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Alcohol and the News: an investigation of Australian news media reports about alcohol policies, expert priorities and audience understandings

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2013
Declaration

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Ethical Clearance

The study protocol was approved by the University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (protocol #12034).
ABSTRACT

Background

Alcohol is associated with a significant societal burden of harm and news media coverage of the issue can affect how different audiences think about potential policy solutions and who is responsible for responding. This thesis investigates relationships between news coverage of alcohol, expert policy advocacy, and audience responses to policy proposals.

Method

Five analyses were used, including three content and framing analyses: (i) five years of television news reports about alcohol; (ii) newspaper and television coverage of the 2008-09 ‘alcopops tax’; (iii) newspaper coverage of alcohol advertising restrictions; and two qualitative analyses focused on alcohol pricing and alcohol advertising restrictions: (iv) in-depth interviews with 21 alcohol policy experts, and (v) eight focus groups discussions with young people, parents of young people, and Australian adults.

Results

Alcohol is covered extensively by Australian television and newspapers, with emphases on harms to health. The ‘alcopops tax’ generated significant news coverage, yet evidence of its effectiveness was relegated to the background, while coverage of alcohol advertising restrictions was relatively limited. Alcohol experts appeared frequently in news coverage and agreed that alcohol’s price and promotion are policy priorities, with some important differences concerning
policy implementation. Audience members expressed concern about alcohol’s harms and supported alcohol policies in principle, but remained unconvinced that existing policies have the capacity to effectively deal with the ‘alcohol problem’.

**Conclusion**

News media advocacy has effectively established that alcohol poses problems. Future media advocacy would benefit from resolving policy differences in order to successfully convince the public of the need for introducing new proposals.
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Big buckets of love to my family, who make everything better. Mum, Dad, David, Jemima, the Highly Commendable Miss Emily Rose, Mighty May, Joanna, Ben, Kirralie, Super Joel, Claire, our resident Skylanders expert, Caleb, and my just-snuck-in-before-deadline-cutie-pie-nephew, Declan: I love youseall!
CHAPTER 1: THESIS STRUCTURE AND PUBLICATIONS

This thesis is focused on news media reporting of alcohol policies, the policy priorities of experts who appear in the news, and the ways that audiences respond to and process the news on alcohol. It is comprised of both published and unpublished work, as outlined below.

Chapter 2: “An introduction to alcohol, associated harms and potential policy responses” provides essential background about the problems posed by alcohol consumption and current best practice in prevention.

Chapter 3: “Alcohol and news media” provides an overview of the literature relevant to alcohol news reporting, policy advocacy by experts in the field and audience understandings of the issues.

Chapter 4: “Australian television news coverage of alcohol, health and related policies, 2005 to 2010: implications for advocacy” contains published work and sets the scene for the current state of news reporting about alcohol. It examines five years of television news reports about alcohol and describes mentions of policies across that period.
Chapter 5: “Framing and the marginalisation of evidence in media reportage of policy debate about alcopops, Australia 2008–2009: Implications for advocacy” contains published work and is the first policy case study of the thesis. It examines newspaper coverage of the ‘alcopops’ tax on ready-to-drink spirit mixes, with a view to identifying the news frames deployed by advocates, interest groups and journalists.

Chapter 6: “Advocates, interest groups and Australian news coverage of alcohol advertising restrictions: content and framing analysis” contains published work and is the second newspaper case study of reporting on alcohol policies. This chapter focuses on news coverage of proposals to restrict alcohol advertising and examines whether reporting changed after the release of strong policy recommendations by a government-appointed taskforce.

Chapter 7: “What should be done about policy on alcohol pricing and promotions? Australian experts' views of policy priorities: a qualitative interview study” contains published work and provides an overview of alcohol policy priorities among Australian experts and policy advocates. The chapter emphasises two policies: alcohol pricing and promotions.

Chapter 8: “‘Like throwing a bowling ball at a battle ship’ Audience responses to Australian news stories about alcohol pricing and promotion policies: a
A "qualitative focus group study" contains published work and focuses on how audiences understand and respond to news reports about alcohol policies. The chapter emphasises two policies: alcohol pricing and promotions.

Chapter 9: “Implications and future directions” is the final chapter which considers the findings from the collected body of work. The implications and significance of the results are discussed, with suggestions made for advocacy and future research.

Though all chapters are focused on exploring the relationships between news reporting, policy advocacy in the media and community attitudes towards such reports, it is intended that each chapter containing published work can also be read as a standalone piece.

The University of Sydney accepts submission of published works as part of a thesis and a copy of the policy is included (Appendix 1). For all published works presented here, my supervisor Professor Simon Chapman is the second author. Together, we conceived all studies and discussed the findings throughout drafting. For each publication presented, I collected and analysed the data, and drafted the manuscript, before seeking input from my supervisor for submission to a journal. Where journals requested, we made declarations about authors’ contributions to the manuscript, which are incorporated in some chapters.
CHAPTER 2: AN INTRODUCTION TO ALCOHOL, ASSOCIATED
HARMS AND POTENTIAL POLICY RESPONSES

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

This chapter provides an introduction to the problem of alcohol consumption in
Australia. It considers consumption rates, potential risks to health, and the
economic and social harms associated with consumption. This is followed by a
summary of best practice in prevention according to the evidence base and the
current policy environment, including the alcohol industry and public health
organisations with an interest in alcohol policy. Lastly, the case study selections
are outlined.
ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

Alcohol sales and customs excise data are used to estimate consumption levels, and are a reliable indicator of actual consumption, with a slight risk of under-estimation [1, 2]. While sales data cannot be clear about who consumed the alcohol, or the frequency of their drinking, they provide estimates of per capita consumption in the population.

Consumption rates and risks to health

In 2010-2011, there were 182 million litres of pure alcohol available to the population, resulting in a per capita rate estimate of ten litres of alcohol [3]. This is 2.2 standard drinks per day for those aged 15 years or more and represents a 2.6% decrease in the per capita rate (10.3L) from the year before [3]. Beer was the most popular beverage, accounting for 42.3% of the 182 million litres, followed by wine (37.4%), spirits (13.2%) and ready-to-drink (RTD) spirit mixers. While per capita consumption increased between 1991-1992 and 2008-2009 [4], since then it has not varied greatly from about ten litres per person. In addition, the National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) surveyed 26,648 people about their use of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs in 2010. They found that 39.5% of respondents aged 14 years or more drank alcohol at least weekly, with 7.2% drinking alcohol daily, which was more common in males than females [5].
Australia has updated drinking guidelines concerning safe levels of alcohol consumption to minimise risks to health [6]. Guideline one states: “for healthy men and women, drinking no more than two standard drinks on any day reduces the lifetime risk of harm from alcohol-related disease or injury” (p39) [6] and guideline two states: “for healthy men and women, drinking no more than four standard drinks on a single occasion reduces the risk of alcohol-related injury arising from that occasion” (p51) [6].

Using these guidelines, in 2011-2012 nearly one in five adults (19.5%) exceeded the lifetime risk of alcohol consumption and men were nearly three times more likely (29.1%) than women (10.1%) to exceed these guidelines [7]. Just under half (44.7%) of all adults exceeded the risk on a single drinking occasion [7]. Similar rates were observed in the NDSHS [5], which found that 39.8% of people aged 14 or more years reported risky drinking on a single occasion in the previous 12 months, the number of people doing so increased from 7.1 million in 2007 to 7.3 million in 2010, and about one in six drank at these levels at least once per week [5].

Thus, while per capita consumption may no longer be increasing, there are still significant numbers of Australians whose drinking habits place them at risk of both acute and long-term harm and these numbers may be increasing.
Young people

Among secondary school students aged 12-17 years, over half drank alcohol in the previous year, 17% did in the previous week, and nearly one in five (19%) 17 year olds reported drinking more than four drinks in one of the previous seven days [8]. Of these current drinkers, 36% reported intending to get drunk most or every time they drank alcohol [8]. In the state of Victoria, one in five drinkers aged 16-24 years reported drinking at very high risk levels on at least a monthly basis [9]. In Western Australia, 36% of students who drank in the previous week consumed at levels that put them at risk of harm from a single occasion, an increase on 1992 where just over 20% reported the same [10]. Young men drank more standard drinks than young women, older students drank more than younger students, and overall students preferred spirits and RTDs than wine or beer [10].

Rates of acute intoxication among young drinkers have increased, as have alcohol-related hospital admissions and visits to the emergency department [11]. A similar pattern has emerged among Swedish young people, where as a group there has been reduced consumption, yet hospitalisations have increased, suggesting that among the heaviest drinkers, consumption might actually have increased [12]. This ‘polarisation effect’ may be occurring in Australia [11] and
represents the clear need to address alcohol related problems, regardless of per capita consumption estimates remaining stable.

**ALCOHOL RELATED HARMs AND COSTS TO SOCIETY**

Alcohol consumption gives rise to a range of costs in both economic and social terms, which affect both the individual and society at large. Alcohol accounts for 3.2% of the burden of disease in Australia [13], up from 2.0% in 2001 [14], and is associated with a variety of harms to health in both the short-term and the long-term, constituting an enormous challenge to public health. In the ten years to 2001, more than 31,000 Australians died as a result of alcohol related injury or disease [15]. Alcohol is linked to 3,430 deaths per year in Australia [13].

*Economic costs*

The most recent estimate of the total social cost of alcohol abuse to Australian society was $15.3 billion during 2004-05. This included at least $10.8 billion in ‘tangible costs’ for example, losses in workplace productivity, or crime or motor vehicle accidents, and ‘intangible costs’ of $4.5 billion (e.g. pain and suffering or loss of life borne by victims) [16]. In New South Wales, the economic cost of alcohol related incidents to which police are called were estimated to be $3,982 per incident of assault, $5,973 per sexual offence, $1,166 per incident of property damage and $501 for each incident of disorderly conduct [17].
A 2010 survey [18] assessed economic costs associated with alcohol’s harm to others, where someone other than the drinker was affected. For example, in 2005, seventy five children aged 0 to 14 years died due to others’ drinking, with 387 potential years of life lost. In total, harms associated with another person’s drinking were estimated to cost Australians $14.3 billion in 2005 [18].

Long-term health risks: non-communicable diseases and mortality

Alcohol is recognised globally as contributing to the increase in disease burden of non-communicable diseases [19]. This includes cancer, liver disease, diabetes and pancreatitis [20, 21], adverse effects on blood pressure [22], cognitive limitations in old age [23], and increased risks for cardiovascular diseases, including strokes [24]. In Australian males there is a strong association between all-cause mortality and per-capita alcohol consumption, particularly among young men aged 15 to 29 years [25].

Short-term health risks: assaults, injuries and motor vehicle accidents

Alcohol consumption is associated with a range of short-term risks to health including assault, injuries and motor vehicle accidents.

Between 1993-94 and 2000-01, there were 76,115 cases of alcohol attributed assault in Australia. In New South Wales, there is a significant relationship between sales of alcohol and incidents of assault [26], as well as an association
between police reporting of assaults and alcohol related visits to emergency departments (ED). An increase of 100 alcohol related visits to the ED in one week was associated with an 11% increase in the number of incidents police attended due to assault in the same week, and this association was found to be strongest among young people aged 15 to 24 years [27]. Also in NSW, peaks in ED presentations vary and coincide with large public gatherings such as New Year’s Eve celebrations and between 2005 and 2008, there was a significant increase in alcohol related presentations to EDs, particularly among 18 to 24 year olds [28].

Heavy drinking episodes are a significant risk factor for non-intentional injuries in 19 countries, a figure that varies with the strength of alcohol policies present [29]. In Australia, among nearly 1,600 ED presentations, 17% reported drinking in the hours preceding their attendance and drinkers were 1.42 times more likely to have sustained an injury than non-drinkers [30].

Alcohol consumption is also a significant contributor to motor-vehicle accidents, where even consumption that is under a legal limit for blood alcohol concentration (BAC) can increase the chances a driver may speed, not wear their seat belt correctly and drive a vehicle that is responsible for the collision [31]. In America, alcohol has been detected in 40.2% of all fatally injured drivers [32]. In Australia, alcohol was linked to 47,167 injuries from motor vehicle accidents in the ten years leading up to 2001 [15].
Harm to others and community amenity

A recent survey of 2,649 Australian adults found that over two thirds (70%) reported being affected by a stranger’s drinking behaviour [33]. A smaller proportion (30%) reported being affected by the drinking of somebody close to them, with women more likely to report being affected by a person in their family or household. Conversely, men were more likely to report being affected by the drinking of strangers or co-workers and the range of harms reported by those in the study varied from noise, nuisance and experiencing fear to being the victim of abuse or sexual coercion [33]. Alcohol abuse by a carer is also a significant risk factor for recurring incidents of child abuse, leaving children highly vulnerable [34].

People that live closer to licensed premises report being kept awake by noise and experiencing greater rates of property damage than those who do not live as close to these premises [35].

BEST PRACTICE IN PREVENTION

Recommendations from around the world are mostly in concert with each other regarding best practice in prevention of alcohol related harms. For example, the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) review of the evidence [36, 37] and global strategy to reduce harmful use of alcohol [38] have a significant amount in
common with Australia’s review and recommendations [39, 40], NHS recommendations in the UK [41], an ‘independent’ strategy released by a concerned health alliance in the UK [42] and the European Action Plan 2012-2020 [43]. Similarly, the cost-effectiveness of introducing these interventions has also been assessed, providing useful rankings on the policies that would have the most effect on alcohol related harms for the least cost [44-48].

In short, an international review [36] concluded that four strategies are well supported by the evidence: (i) regulating the physical availability of alcohol, (ii) taxation and pricing measures, (iii) drink-driving countermeasures, and (iv) treatment and early intervention. In addition, three other strategies are identified as candidates for prevention, where the evidence base is not as well developed (i.e. multiple studies in numerous countries), but are still indicated as potentially effective [39, 49]: (i) altering the drinking context where alcohol is consumed, (ii) regulating alcohol advertising, and (iii) education and persuasion strategies. Australia’s National Preventative Health Taskforce (NPHT) is mostly in agreement with the international review, though argues that treating alcohol dependence via tertiary care is less cost-effective than using brief interventions in primary care. Additionally, Australia recommends education in schools and the implementation of mass media campaigns, which are well-designed, well-funded and sustained long-term in partnership “with other measures such as support services, changes to the environment, regulation and enforcement” (p 35) [39].
Table one summarises the NPHT recommendations as the basis for policy priorities in Australia and is adapted from their report (p19) [39]. It notes the strategies available (as above), gives specific examples of the kinds of interventions that could be used, rates whether they are effective, notes the numbers of well-designed studies examining each approach and shows the NPHT’s recommendations for their implementation.

A recent study of alcohol interventions in Australia found that current spending was cost-effective, but concluded that spending could be more wisely invested in a broader suite of prevention interventions that would work in concert to achieve much greater gains in health than at present [48].
**TABLE 1.1: Summary of prevention interventions for Australia, adapted from [39] and [44]**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PREVENTION STRATEGY TYPE</th>
<th>SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF STRATEGY</th>
<th>EFFECTIVENESS</th>
<th>NUMBER OF STUDIES</th>
<th>NPHT RECOMMENDED?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regulating alcohol’s availability</td>
<td>Minimum purchase age</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>5+</td>
<td>In place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hours and days of sale restrictions</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staggered closing times for bars</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Contra-indicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduced availability of full-strength (e.g. sport events)</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>Some in place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxation and pricing</td>
<td>Taxes (e.g. volumetric tax)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>5+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Setting a minimum ‘floor’ price</td>
<td>Untested at present</td>
<td>Research needed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hypothecated tax for prevention and treatments</td>
<td>Untested at present</td>
<td>Research needed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drink-driving countermeasures</td>
<td>Random breath testing</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>In place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limits on blood alcohol concentration (BAC) (lower for younger drivers)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduated license systems for novice drivers</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>In place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment and early intervention</td>
<td>Brief interventions in primary health care settings</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>5+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alcohol problems treatment</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>5+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altering the drinking context</td>
<td>Bans on serving intoxicated patrons</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>5+</td>
<td>Yes, if enforced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Training staff to prevent intoxication/aggression</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plastic glasses</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulating promotion</td>
<td>Partial or total bans on advertising</td>
<td>Untested at present</td>
<td>More research</td>
<td>Yes, for information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Restrictions on content of advertising</td>
<td>Untested at present</td>
<td>More research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and persuasion</td>
<td>Alcohol education in schools</td>
<td>Lacking</td>
<td>5+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent education</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>More research</td>
<td>More research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public service messages/mass media campaigns</td>
<td>More research</td>
<td>More research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Warning labels and drinking guidelines</td>
<td>Lacking</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE POLICY ENVIRONMENT

Taken together, the costs of alcohol related harms to society provide a clear imperative to utilise national policy recommendations and evaluations of their cost-effectiveness as described above. National policies that address health and social concerns are therefore an important priority for public health professionals and organisations. In Australia, the current policy environment is arguably conducive to the introduction of alcohol control policies and there are a number of strategies, organisations and recommendations that prioritise alcohol action. The following section describes the existing policy environment for alcohol control.


The last national alcohol-specific strategy document was the 2006-2009 National Alcohol Strategy [50], which prioritised four aims: (i) reduced intoxication among drinkers, (ii) enhanced public safety and amenity in areas where alcohol is consumed, (iii) improved health outcomes among drinkers, and (iv) safer and healthier drinking cultures. In April 2009, an extension to the term of the strategy was approved until 2011[51].

After 2011, the National Drug Strategy 2010 – 2015 [40] covered alcohol and other drugs (AOD), with three key pillars to address the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs: (i) demand reduction, (ii) supply reduction, and (iii) harm
reduction. Taken together this includes preventing the uptake and use of alcohol, supporting people through treatment for dependence, controlling the supply of alcohol and reducing the prevalence of harms in the community, reflecting the principles of harm minimisation.

*National Binge Drinking Strategy 2008 – 2012*

The National Binge Drinking Strategy (NBDS) has emphases on young people and ‘binge drinking’ where binge drinking refers to drinking a large amount of alcohol in a short time, with the intention of getting drunk. It aims to raise community awareness of the impacts of risky drinking and help to create changes in the drinking culture, making it more responsible over time [52]. The strategy committed money to reducing alcohol sponsorship of sporting organisations and exposure of young people to alcohol advertising, as well as providing funding to community organisations that designed projects to reduce binge drinking among 12 to 24 year olds. However, it should be noted that the strategy has yet to demonstrate any lasting impact, with a target group of young, risky drinkers having no recollection or recall of the campaign messages [53].

*Australian National Council on Drugs*

A potential source of advice for the Australian Government regarding policy on AOD is the Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD), which attempts to ensure that the policies used are in keeping with the National Drug Strategy [54].
The ANCD’s 2011 – 2014 work plan [55] has alcohol as one of its 18 priority areas for action and aims to support evidence-based policies that reduce alcohol’s availability, collection of alcohol sales data, policies that address risky drinking among young people and to develop greater knowledge concerning use of services and barriers to treatment for alcohol dependence.

National Preventative Health Taskforce and National Preventive Health Agency

During 2008, the National Preventative Health Taskforce (NPHT) was established to develop a National Preventative Health Strategy [56]. The Taskforce was instructed to focus on tobacco, obesity and alcohol as three of the largest contributors to preventable illness in Australia. In addition to the NPHT’s 2009 recommendations for alcohol [39], a key recommendation in the overall strategy was the formation of the Australian National Preventive Health Agency (ANPHA). It was established in January 2011 with six strategic goals to promote a healthier Australia through evidence-based policies and strategic partnerships [57]. ANPHA retained some of the Taskforce’s initial focus on obesity, tobacco and alcohol and provides advice directly to the Health Minister or may seek input as necessary from an Advisory Council comprised of 11 members representing state and territory governments, as well as the Commonwealth [58].
THE DRINKS INDUSTRY

In addition to the governmental and health policy environment, alcohol policies in Australia exist in a competing climate, where the goals of public health are often at odds with the commercial aims of the alcoholic drinks industry.

The Australian alcohol industry is comprised of multiple companies in three major sectors: beer, wine and spirits. It is dominated by large international interests who have bought established Australian brands. For example, SABMiller, a global interest, acquired the Australian Foster’s Group holdings in 2011, which includes the Carlton United Brewery brands [59]. Almost 90% of beer sold in Australia has a parent company of one of two foreign-owned companies, SABMiller, or its international competitor Lion [59].

This is markedly different to the wine sector, where the top five wine manufacturers account for less than half of the market share and include Australian companies [60]. While the numbers of growers declined between 2005 and 2010, the average vineyard holding grew by 15%, and between 2000 and 2010 the number of wine companies doubled and exports of wine increased, making Australia fourth in volume of wine exported in 2007 [61]. The share of the market accounted for by spirits producers and wholesalers is much smaller than the market share for beer or wine and like beer, the majority of spirits sold are owned by foreign companies [59, 60].
Combined, in 2009-10 the alcohol industries in Australia contributed just under $4 billion in taxes for the government [62], comprised of $3,105 million in excise duty (beer: $1,991 million, spirits: $1,114 million) and $748 million collected via the Wine Equalisation Tax [63]. The majority of alcohol sales are made in the retail sector, followed by licensed outlets like bars and restaurants [60]. Nearly 60% of all retail sales of alcohol occur in subsidiaries of just two parent companies, Woolworths Limited and Wesfarmers Limited (Coles supermarkets) [64].

INTEREST GROUPS AND ORGANISATIONS

In any public debate about alcohol policy, various interest groups have a stake in having their position heard, particularly if government is to pass legislation. For example, senate inquiries into alcohol policy proposals typically receive submissions from public health organisations and alcohol industry groups who represent either the production or retail of alcohol [65, 66]. While inquiries may receive submissions from private individuals, for the purpose of this news media focused PhD, interest groups are characterised as those organisations which act as peak bodies on behalf of their members, or occupy a public policy role and provide spokespeople at the news media’s request.
Table 1.2 summarises the relevant public health organisations and associations with an interest in national alcohol policies for preventing alcohol-related harm. It notes their composition and stated aims for alcohol. For brevity, the table focuses on public health organisations where alcohol is clearly articulated as core organisational focus, or on larger policy coalitions, such as the National Alliance for Action on Alcohol, whose membership continues to grow and covers the enormous variety of groups associated with achieving change (e.g. The Cancer Council, Australian Dental Foundation, Police Federation of Australia, Kidney Health Australia, National Rural Health Alliance, etc.) [67, 68].

Table 1.3 summarises the relevant drinks industry organisations and coalitions, with representatives from both the production and retail sectors, along with their stated aims where they are relevant to alcohol policy.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHO</th>
<th>WHAT</th>
<th>STATED GOALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Alliance for Action on Alcohol (NAAA) [69]</td>
<td>National coalition of over 70 health and community organisations</td>
<td>Reducing alcohol related harms with a focus on policy advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol and Other Drugs Council of Australia (ADCA) [70]</td>
<td>A not-for-profit national peak body whose members are organisations in the AOD sector</td>
<td>Promote evidence-informed, socially just approaches that confront the health, economic and social harm alcohol and other drugs cause individuals, families, communities and the nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Drug Research Institute (NDRI) [71]</td>
<td>Research centre based at Curtin University, WA</td>
<td>Conduct research regarding the prevention of AOD related harms and harm minimisation through legislative, fiscal, regulatory and educational interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) [72]</td>
<td>Research centre based at the University of New South Wales</td>
<td>Conduct research that aims to improve the effectiveness of treatment and other interventions into AOD related harms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) [73]</td>
<td>An independent charity</td>
<td>Change the way Australians drink, support alcohol policy reform and starting public conversations about the drinking culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol Policy Coalition (APC) [74]</td>
<td>Victorian-based collaboration among several health agencies interested in alcohol’s misuse</td>
<td>Taking on an advocacy role for evidence based policy reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) [75]</td>
<td>Forum for public health matters. Branches and members in each state, with 17 Special Interest Groups, one of which is alcohol</td>
<td>Advocacy for public health policy, development, research and training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCusker Centre for Action on Alcohol and Youth (MCAAY) [76]</td>
<td>Established via donation from the McCusker Charitable Foundation</td>
<td>To reduce alcohol related harms in young people through reduced overall consumption and lower risk patterns of consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Medical Association (AMA) [77]</td>
<td>A peak body organisation for doctors and medical students</td>
<td>Promote and protect the professional interests of doctors and the health care needs of patients and communities Provide expert medical commentary and respond to health issues such as alcohol</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 1.3: Australian drinks industry groups and organisations with a presumed interest in national alcohol policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHO</th>
<th>WHAT</th>
<th>STATED GOALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Winemakers’ Federation of Australia (WFA) [78] | National peak body for grape growers                                | Provide leadership, strategy, advocacy and support for members  
Represent and protect their interests                                                                                                                    |
| The Brewers’ Association of Australia and New Zealand [79] | Represents brewers in legislative and regulatory affairs             | The promotion of beer as a refreshing and lower-alcohol alternative to other drinks categories  
Believes in the need for targeted intervention that will successfully reduce harms for specific impact groups                                                   |
| Distilled Spirits Industry Council of Australia (DSICA) [80] | National peak body for spirit manufacturers, ten members            | Create an informed political and social environment that recognises the benefits of moderate alcohol intake and to provide opportunities for balanced community discussion on alcohol issues  
Ensure public alcohol policies are soundly and objectively formed, that they include alcohol industry input, that they are based on the latest national and international scientific research and that they do not unfairly disadvantage the spirits sector  
Support the current quasi-regulatory regime for alcohol advertising                                                                                      |
| Australian Hotels Association (AHA) [81] | National organisation with 5,000 members, with state and territory branches | Ensure the significant economic and social contributions made by hotels are recognised by governments  
Promote the continued development of the Australian hospitality and tourism sector  
Promote and encourage new investment in the hotel industry  
Protect the interests of the hotel sector against harsh or excessive regulation.  
Work to ensure hotels are able to operate and compete on a level playing field, with fair access to the products and services required to meet customer demands                                                                 |
| Clubs Australia [82]                      | National, peak industry body whose members are 6,000 licensed clubs and 96,000 employees, with state and territory branches | Represent members interests                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Australian Liquor Stores Association (ALSA) [83] | National peak retail liquor industry body, representing all alcohol retail stores (off-license) | ALSA is focused on a sustainable and profitable retail liquor industry, and believes that the responsible and controlled service of liquor is of the utmost importance, promoting these beliefs to members and retailers. |
The special case of DrinkWise

The DrinkWise website says the organisation was first “established in 2005 by the alcohol industry” before asserting that it is “an independent, not-for-profit organisation focused on promoting change towards a healthier and safer drinking culture in Australia” through the use of evidence based strategies [84]. DrinkWise supports this claim by pointing to their implementation of a national education campaign about the impact of alcohol on developing young brains (i.e. “Kids and Alcohol Don’t Mix”) and a second campaign to delay the age at which young people are introduced to alcohol (i.e. “Kids Absorb Your Drinking”) [85].

However, while DrinkWise claims to be an ostensibly independent organisation, questions have arisen concerning its original establishment by the alcohol industry and its structure based on “industry leadership and community partnerships” [84]. DrinkWise’s board consists of six alcohol industry representatives and seven of what DrinkWise terms “community representatives (drawn from health, law enforcement, communications and public policy fields)” [84]. However, it should be noted that it is unclear how DrinkWise defines ‘community’ and that community board members do not include alcohol policy experts associated with the NAAA. In fact, given the still prominent role of alcohol industry representatives in DrinkWise’s current structure, many public health experts are clear that the organisation is affected by a glaring conflict of interest between its stated aims and the commercial interests represented by its
board members [86, 87]. Experts have been vocal that DrinkWise operates solely as a public relations organisation which helps to create the impression that the drinks industry acts responsibly in relation to alcohol’s harms, yet fails to publicly support interventions recommended as best practice in prevention [87].

An analysis of DrinkWise press releases supports this concern about whether or not the organisation truly supports evidence based research [88]. In short, DrinkWise press releases were found to frame responsibility for changing Australia’s drinking culture as a matter for the individual, instead of promoting public health’s preferred policies which would affect the environment individuals operate within. This messaging has been picked up and reported similarly in newspapers.

In addition to its original alcohol industry backed funding, in 2006, DrinkWise received a government contribution of AU$5 million to use over a period of four years. In 2012, a change in government saw a new federal government donate AU$600,000 to produce and distribute material concerned with the risks of drinking alcohol while pregnant. Concerned about DrinkWise’s role in funding alcohol research, and in reaction to government contributions to the organisation, a prominent group of public health experts published a letter declaring they would not accept research funding from industry-backed organisations [89, 90], along with a list of signatories [91].
THESIS OBJECTIVES

In view of the problems posed by alcohol, the policy environment in which policy recommendations operate and the organisations and interest groups that make public comment on the matter, the objective of this thesis is to examine the news context where alcohol control policies are reported, with a view to providing insight into how industry representatives frame opposition to public health policies, with subsequent suggestions for policy advocacy via news media in the future. The approach utilises three areas of study:

- **News content**: analysis of news media reporting concerning alcohol policies, with an emphasis on positions stated by representatives of public health, the government and the alcohol industry
- **Alcohol experts and policy advocates**: their priorities for alcohol and public commentary in general
- **News audiences**: understanding of, and responses to, the news on alcohol policies

*Case study selection*

Reviews of alcohol control policies consistently highlight that interventions which target the whole population are considered more effective in reducing alcohol related harms than interventions which target high-risk sub-groups within the population, and on the whole, are more cost-effective [36, 39]. For this reason, I
have chosen to focus on policies with the potential to be introduced or maintained nationally. This is not to say that only national alcohol policies can be effective tools in reducing the health burden related to alcohol. Indeed, responsibility for several important policies is borne at a state government level, for example, restrictions on trading hours, administration of licenses and associated outlet density. However, given the numerous state apparatus involved in the implementation of such policies (e.g. multiple police forces, multiple judiciaries, multiple governments of different parties), the likelihood of implementation varies by state to state accordingly. The selection of national policies is therefore intended to cover policies whose introduction would involve slightly less complexity state to state, and which have the scope and potential to affect a majority of Australians.

Given the manifold, state-based variations in liquor licensing, investigating policies that restrict alcohol’s availability or alter drinking contexts were beyond the scope of the project, as are brief interventions in clinical settings which focus on individuals in high-risk groups. Though there is the potential to implement further policies targeting drink driving (e.g. alcohol ignition locks in cars), on the whole, legislative proposals are largely already enacted in Australia. For those measures which are not yet in place, there are no imminent signs of changes in policy at the time of writing. I chose not to focus on education and persuasion strategies due to a lack of a large scale, well-financed and sustained campaigns
available for evaluation in Australia. I chose instead to focus on policy areas where the evidence base is clearer, well-developed and where policy change is clearly advocated in policy position statements by public health organisations.

Thus, this thesis will focus on policies aimed at alcohol’s price and promotion. These were selected as examples of two policies which can be implemented nationally without the same level of state-based variations that licensing is affected by. Pricing was selected as an example where the evidence of effectiveness is strong and where some strategies are already in place. Alcohol advertising restrictions were selected as an example of a policy that is recommended for implementation, yet currently exists as a proposal for future policy advocacy and changes to legislation. These are discussed in brief below, with further detailing in later chapters focused specifically on these policies.

Alcohol taxation and pricing measures
Alcohol pricing measures consist of manipulations to the taxes applied to alcohol, and setting a minimum ‘floor’ price below which alcohol cannot be sold. Taxation policies which increase alcohol price are reviewed as effective measures to reduce consumption [92-96] and minimum pricing can be useful in reducing alcohol consumption among problem drinkers [97-101]. Conversely, where alcohol prices decrease, hospitalisations can increase [102].
The Henry Tax Review examined Australia’s overall tax system in order to make recommendations to assist with dealing with demographic, social, economic and environmental challenges in the years ahead [103]. As part of the Review, a particular recommendation was made that alcohol should be taxed according to the percentage alcohol in a drink, known as ‘volumetric taxation’[104]. There is high support among public health advocates for alcohol taxation policies in Australia [105], likewise for setting a minimum floor price [106]. Chapters 5, 7 and 8 focus on alcohol taxation and pricing.

*Alcohol advertising restrictions*

Alcohol advertising restrictions refer to a range of potential strategies that include bans or partial bans on alcohol advertising, or restrictions on the content of advertisements and regulating both the frequency and placement of alcohol advertising material. While there is limited evidence concerning the exact effects of such strategies, in large part due to such restrictions rarely being tried, there is still some evidence that implementing alcohol advertising restrictions would be a cost-effective approach [44]. Support for alcohol advertising restrictions is high among public health organisations [107-110]. Chapters 6, 7, and 8, deal with alcohol advertising restrictions in detail.
CHAPTER 3: ALCOHOL AND NEWS MEDIA

This chapter provides an introduction to the influence of news media in shaping public understanding of social issues and influencing policy agendas, before reviewing the research literature on news media representations of alcohol and alcohol control policies. It introduces framing theory as the basis for analyses in later chapters and describes advocacy by news actors in pursuit of policy changes.
NEWS MEDIA AND AUDIENCE EFFECTS

The following provides a brief introduction to the historical context and key developments in communication research with regard to news coverage of political issues and audience understandings. The discussion reviews initial work that recognised the role of journalists in selecting and emphasising news stories, followed in the 70’s by growing recognition of the news media’s power to shape community agendas, and the subsequent appreciation of the multiple variables that fundamentally affect audience understandings of news communications. Framing theory is presented as a widely used tool to examine how news stories can begin to shape community perceptions, with an acknowledgment of the differences in how audiences can respond to the ‘framed’ picture of events.

The role of journalists in shaping news

Acceptance of new policies by both the public and policy makers in positions to implement change can depend on whether they see events or developments as problematic, who they believe is responsible for them and their resolution, and how they understand the solutions being proposed. A key factor in this process is the news media and the ways in which they frame events and issues selected as being newsworthy. As noted by Smith and Bell (p85), “the influence of the media in reflecting, constructing and expressing, culture, politics and social life should not be
They argue that the way a news story is presented reveals how an issue or event is located within existing social narratives and the journalist’s perceptions about what is important. This, in turn, provides important data for research about the way social understandings develop over time [111]. Bell paid particular attention to news media’s use of language [112], for example, asking whether the language used is emotive or impartial. He argued that analysis of language reveals information about a journalist’s choices, which reflect pre-existing social discussions or can powerfully condition new ways of speaking about events and phenomena [112]. This approach to news media content highlights the role of journalists in both selecting and interpreting issues and events for the public and signalling the importance, or lack thereof, of issues in a story with attendant effects on audience perception. As Philo states, “it is perfectly possible for a subject to be covered extensively on the news, while journalists might also ‘cue’ the audience into seeing it as not very significant. So in this sense journalists are intervening and renegotiating the significance of the event” (p103) [113]. Recognition of the mass reach of news media and the journalist’s role in shaping the content presented has led to questions about the effects this has on audiences, and their understanding of what is at issue.

*Locating power within the media*
Communication research acknowledges the role of media in reflecting and shaping social discourse, and today asks “What is the extent, and what are the limits, of media power?” to influence those who consume media representations of issues (p11) [114]. Early approaches such as the ‘hypodermic model’ characterised the audience as passive receptacles for media messages which were ‘injected’ into them and concluded audience effects could be simply deduced from examining the content of news media [114, 115]. This model lost favour when examination of media political campaigns demonstrated that audience voting behaviour was affected by more proximate, interpersonal factors than just media broadcasts [116]. As a result of such studies, audiences were no longer viewed as passive receptacles and instead they were recognised as consuming media messages using values and pre-existing understandings, which are discussed further in the next section.

In the 1970s, research found that the frequency and extent of news attention to an issue affected audience perceptions of its importance. Moreover, changes in the frequency of the news media’s attention to an issue were mirrored by changes in the public’s concern for problems. This phenomenon became known as the ‘agenda setting’ function of the media, implying that news broadcasts can increase the perceived importance of an issue in the audience’s mind simply through frequent attention to an issue [117]. Subsequent ‘second level agenda setting research’
expanded this focus on the frequency of media attention to incorporate salient attributes of particular news stories, so that research examined not only the amount of coverage an issue received, but also how news media described the issue in question [118]. Other approaches include the ‘behavioural effects’ tradition. This approach involved exposing experimental groups to media and measuring differences between experimental group responses and those of an unexposed control group, or testing audience attitudes, intentions and behaviours before and after a viewing a film [114, 119]. Others argued that the power of the media to affect audiences lay in its pervasiveness and ability to communicate messages cumulatively over time, known as ‘cultivation theory’ [114, 120].

One of the more durable and long-lasting approaches to examining news media’s power to affect audiences is ‘framing theory’ or ‘frame analysis’ which developed around the same time as agenda-setting theories. Framing theory refers to the use of ‘frames’ or ‘frameworks’ to organise and understand information and experiences [121] and nowadays can refer to the tendency of news coverage to employ frames in creating narratives, that by definition present some information while excluding other information. Research on framing is concerned with the production of frames in news coverage, not just the frequency of reporting or the amount of media attention an issue receives, as in the earliest agenda-setting research [122]. A recent
review of conceptual issues in framing [123] highlighted that historically, framing research has drawn upon a diverse range of disciplines, including sociology, economics, psychology, political science and media studies, resulting in “paradigmatic diversity” (p26) [123].

Early work by Goffman [cited in: [122]] examining life events is acknowledged as bringing ‘frameworks of understanding’ to popular research attention and conceived them as tools that help an individual to perceive, identify, and label the broad social diversity they encountered in their lives. Sociological research has historically examined frames in communicating texts, and focused on the presentation of information rather than frames used by audiences to process it. Later work by Gitlin [124] emphasised that media frames are used by journalists to organise large amounts of information into packages the audience can digest.

Similarly, in evaluating news coverage of the Cold War, Gamson concluded that news media frames diagnose, evaluate and prescribe solutions through selective reporting of particular bits of information [125, 126]. In short, news media frames are “how an account organises reality” (p15) [114], and represent “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion” [124] (p7).
Framing research arising out of the cognitive psychology discipline highlights that how information is presented, or ‘framed’, can prime people to respond in particular ways and affect subsequent decisions. For example, presenting the same information in two different ways, highlighting either losses or gains, can affect the types of risks a person takes [127]. Thus, taken together, framing research generally distinguishes between frames in the news, versus frames in the individual’s mind termed ‘schemata’ [123]. Such characterisations imply that frames exist in a variety of settings, including “the conversation we have, the media we consume, the questionnaire we fill in... “ (p136) [122]. How frames can affect audiences is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

In 1993, Entman argued that despite manifold approaches, the concept of framing “consistently offers a way to describe the power of a communicating text” (p51) [121] and that analysis of frames can shed light on the way transfer and communication of information exerts an effect on public understanding. In this way, news media participates in the construction of reality for and by audiences. Recognising the different approaches to framing across disciplines, Entman attempted to identify common features and articulate a precise definition of framing for future research: “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived
reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described…” (p52) [121].

Over the years, different disciplinary approaches to framing theory have been embraced by some as comprehensive and flexible [128], but seen by others as problematic and lacking in needed conceptual clarity [129]. Fisher notes “taken as a whole, the many branches of frame analysis literature do not exhibit consensus over some basic questions, including what frames are or how individuals and cultures make use of frames” [130]. Like Entman, Scheufele argues for a model that uses a common approach, and makes distinctions between frames in media texts and frames used by audiences to determine meaning [129]. To date, Entman’s account remains the most highly cited paper in this area, with Google Scholar showing 4,458 cites by 12 June 2013 [131].

**Audience-centred accounts**

In concert with approaches that sought to identify the ways in which media can affect audiences, other scholars recognised that audiences were not simply passive receptacles for broadcast or published material, absorbing messages to which they were exposed. Here, the “uses and gratifications” model of communication
highlighted active participation by audiences who consciously choose between media sources according to their own interests or needs [114, 132]. This model positioned media as competing with other sources of satisfaction and recognised the power of audience members to selectively discern which media was of interest. In making such a choice, audiences are positioned as having a particular goal to satisfy, such as being informed or entertained, identifying with particular news actors, or escaping stress or boredom and thus gratified their needs through their choice of media [132]. Another approach, the “two step model” of media communication highlights how news actors (i.e. those appearing in the news) mediate news messages for audiences [116]. This model recognises the power of opinion leaders to give their personal interpretations of news events, thereby influencing the audience response, in addition to the actual media content. This became known as a ‘personal influence’ particularly where audience members were similar in terms of personality, or demographics, or socioeconomic status.

The debate about the power of media texts versus the agency of audiences in decoding meaning is on-going, with Kitzinger noting that “sometimes each side simply ignores the other...” (p25) [114].
Here, research has focused on the interaction between media and audience, arguing that before media messages can have any effect, they must be consumed and interpreted. Following semiotic principles, Stuart Hall [133] recognised that all media content is “encoded” with signs which can be read by anyone with cultural competency to recognise and understand the meaning of the codes that have been selected by media producers like journalists. These producers encode their writings, interviews and selection of scenes with a ‘preferred reading’ which may be shared by many consuming the message [111, 133]. Audiences interpret the communicated message according to a variety of influences, a process termed ‘decoding’. As Morley states, “…the messages that we receive from the media do not confront us in isolation. They intersect with other messages we have received – explicit and implicit messages, from other institutions, people we know, or sources we trust… thus how we respond to the messages from the media depends precisely on the extent to which they fit with, or possibly contradict, other messages, other viewpoints that we have come across in the other areas of our lives…” (p77) [115].

Of primary concern here is the recognition that audiences have the ability to decode different understandings, or ‘readings’ of the same material, reflecting their own experiences and values. However, while different readings may arise from one media source, Hall argues there is still a limit on the range of possible readings
owing to the moment of ‘encoding’ which exerts a form of ‘closure’ or
determination of the meaning construed [133]. This is echoed by Philo, whose
research with the Glasgow Media Group was “critical of broadcasters’ claims to
objectivity and impartiality when the news was actually reproducing the
assumptions of the powerful about what was necessary and possible in society”
(p105) [113].

Three broad positions are recognised that audience members may take in decoding
media communications: (i) a dominant or preferred reading, where the codes used
to encode and decode the material are aligned, allowing the audience member to
see the material as the media producers intended; (ii) a negotiated reading, where
the audience member largely accepts the meaning as encoded in the material, yet
modifies the preferred meaning according to their own personal experiences or
interests; and (iii) an oppositional reading, where an audience member may
recognise the meaning being presented, yet rejects this account, instead bringing
alternative considerations or explanations to the forefront and thereby critiquing
the preferred reading’s meaning [114, 133]. These theoretical positions were
examined by Morley in his study of the television audience for the British current
affairs program ‘Nationwide’. He found that audience members adopted one of
these three positions, and this was associated with their socio-economic class [115,
Thus it was concluded that in addition to the moment of ‘encoding’ limiting the range of possible audience readings, where an audience member was “socially embedded” also produced limits on the range of preferred, negotiated or oppositional readings available.

**News framing and audience effects**

News media then, with its mass reach and varied modes of communication, can powerfully shape dominant notions of the meaning of particular events [135, 136], affect public discourse on particular topics [137, 138], set public and political agendas and provoke audience reactions [118, 139]. This occurs through the media providing selected information, or ‘ways of seeing’ which highlight certain aspects of the story, while pushing other information to the background or outside of the dominant frame altogether [113, 122, 137]. Shanto Iyengar’s work on the framing of poverty illustrates how the emphasis of news frames directly affects the range of considerations available to the audience [140]. He analysed 191 television news stories related to poverty in the US and found they fell largely within two kinds of story: “one set described poverty primarily as a societal or collective outcome while the other described poverty in terms of particular victims, for example, poor people” (p21). The first set of stories were termed ‘thematic’ framing, which were likely to consist of information about general trends, or matters of public policy; the latter
set were termed ‘episodic’ framing, which featured personal experiences or a particular example of an individual and were far more prevalent throughout the sample. Iyengar reported that when confronted with thematic frames in news accounts of poverty, audience members held societal factors, such as poor government responsible for poverty. However, when exposed to episodic framing, audience members were more likely to hold the individual responsible for their circumstances. This held across an experimental manipulation, with participants more likely to hold government and policy makers responsible for both the causes of and solutions to poverty when material was presented within a thematic frame [140]. Similar conclusions about the impact of episodic and thematic framing were observed concerning news reports about crime, terrorism, unemployment, poverty and racial inequality where (p70) “… by reducing complex issues to the level of anecdotal cases, episodic framing leads viewers to attributions that shield society and government from responsibility... viewers come to focus on the particular individuals or groups depicted in the news, rather than historical, social, political or other such structural factors” [141, 142].

More recently, research examining the issue of mandatory minimum sentencing found that even if episodic frames were manipulated to elicit sympathy for the individual depicted, thematic framing was still more persuasive in eliciting
opposition to mandatory sentencing [143]. In short, news media frames can affect whether particular problems are perceived by the audience as in need of a response and who they think are responsible for responding [117, 141, 142].

A large body of research has considered the effects of news frames on behaviour and attitudes [129, 138, 144-148]. With regard to health, several effects have been observed, including changes in attitude or behaviour in response to news stories about childhood vaccination [149], celebrity diagnoses of cancer [150], hormone replacement therapy [151], contraception [152], mental illness [135, 153], suicide [154], to give a range of examples. Globally, health and medicine are frequent news topics [155-161] and news media are unparalleled sources of health information for the public. Given the importance of news coverage in influencing public and political agendas, investigation of news media representations of issues which are the focus of public health advocacy holds promise as a way of better understanding both barriers to change and ways that advocates might be more potent in their use of media [162, 163].

Policy Advocacy and News Sources

Echoing Iyengar, in 1998, Dorfman stated that “the relationship of contributing factors to alcohol problems is rarely visible in entertainment, advertising or news
stories... key variables such as unemployment, income, education, proliferation of alcohol outlets, saturation-level advertising, inappropriately low prices and public health approaches to prevention will not be considered as seriously as the solutions are being debated” (p74) [164]. She suggested that alcohol researchers should play a specific role in assisting journalists to make connections between these variables in alcohol news stories. Public health experts could attempt to influence the frames deployed by news media and shift public discussion towards prevention solutions. This approach is termed policy advocacy and represents a key focus of this thesis. Holder [165] theorises that policy advocacy which shapes the news agenda can in turn build community pressure on decision makers, resulting in long lasting policy changes for health. For example, in the USA news media reports of problems in patient safety that shamed the medical profession were associated with considerable innovation to reduce medical errors and improve patient safety [166]. Research into tobacco and alcohol media advocacy in several local communities found that greater victories occur when media advocacy is used in conjunction with community organisation around larger strategic policy goals, and can be a powerful tool for public health [167].

However, as noted in chapter 2, other groups also have vested interests in shaping public discussion. These groups are keen to avoid negative framings of their
activities and to advance their own agendas, as has been observed in tobacco and obesity [137, 168]. One study of news ‘sources’ or news actors on television examined 783 appearances of interest group members and found that businesses and corporations accounted for 36.5%, while citizen action groups accounted for 32%. However they noted that appearances by citizen action groups were mostly related to unpopular protests and showed that equal access to news media and representativeness was not present, with the study concluding “it is of interest to know not only who sings in the choir but also who pays the singers and writes the songs” (p1077) [169]. Likewise, research on public health advocacy in the news has found that journalists could consider expanding their pool of news sources, provide greater context in news reports and consider epidemiology risk factor findings when asking questions [170].

In Australia, policy advocacy by public health advocates has been successful in raising awareness of issues and supporting policy change [171, 172]. Research with Australian journalists on their coverage of health issues such as avian influenza and pandemic planning found that journalists trusted independent, respected doctors as sources for health issues and attempted to report on the facts, by balancing the different accounts given by multiple sources [173].
In summary

The framing of news on health in Australia can become a struggle between policy advocates and vested interests to assert different frames of understanding, or to avoid negative framings unconducive to policy reform, and are therefore of great research interest. It is important however, to acknowledge and examine the different ways that audiences process or ‘decode’ meaning from such news.

Given the complexity of approaches to framing and frame analysis and diversity of research findings, it is important, as recommended by Scheufele, to choose and clearly define one’s approach to news frame analysis. Owing to its outstanding popularity across disciplines, extensive use, well established track record in research, and clear definition, this thesis will use Entman’s characterisation of framing to underpin its analyses of news content in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

ALCOHOL IN THE MEDIA

“The way the public thinks about various approaches to preventing alcohol related problems is largely dependent on how this issue is portrayed in the media, particularly the news” (p66) [164].
Alcohol in the mass media

A multitude of studies have examined the representation of alcohol in the media [174-176]. This includes looking at music videos [177-179], television programming [180-184], radio programs [185], magazines [186-188], comic strips [189], social media networks [190] and other online media [191]. Most found that people are exposed to substantial glamourised depictions of alcohol, often in partnership with highly sexual imagery, and devoid of health context. In addition, exposure to such media can often entail high exposure to alcohol advertisements, as is notably the case with television [192-194] and magazines [195-198]. This is of concern considering longitudinal studies which show high exposure to media content containing alcohol can affect drinking choices later [199-203]. However, not as much research has paid attention to alcohol in news media. A 2007 review found that most studies concerning alcohol in the media focused largely on advertising and entertainment and that the role of news reporting could be widened to encompass the social context and implications of drinking [204]. Alcohol in the news has received relatively little research interest in Australia. The following discussion reviews research related to alcohol and news media, starting in the 1990s as the period of most relevance leading up to today’s policy environment.
Alcohol in news media

A literature review was performed using two databases, Web of Science [205] and Communication & Mass Media Complete [206]. Using the search terms “alcohol” and “news media” to identify potential studies, papers were included where alcohol was mentioned in relation to either news content or audience responses to news content concerning alcohol. Papers were excluded where the focus of the paper was on another medium, for example advertising, which may have mentioned ‘news media’ only in passing. Figure 1 shows the literature review process:
Figure 1: Literature review process of exclusion and inclusion

Search terms: alcohol, news media
WEB OF SCIENCE, COMMUNICATION AND MASS MEDIA COMPLETE
N=298 references

Deleted: duplicated & irrelevant references (n=161),

N=132 references mentioning “alcohol” and “news media”

Excluded references that mentioned news in passing but were focused on the following:
- advertising (n=25)
- education and awareness campaigns (n=28)
- other media e.g. TV, movies (n=38)
- other drugs (n=11)

30 references remaining

Articles concerning news media CONTENT
N=24

Articles concerning news AUDIENCES
N=6
A summary table of the 30 references covered can be found in Appendix 2. The following discussion describes the key research findings, although each paper is not individually covered extensively.

Most research findings in this area come from the United States, where researchers have focused mostly on the content of newspaper and television reports [207-210] and reporting concerning alcohol policies. These studies have typically concluded that there is need for better policy advocacy in the news. Early work examining television reporting from three major networks over 36 days in 1990 found 43 stories related to alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs, where illicit drugs clearly dominated. Only seven of those stories related to alcohol, with four focused on alcohol taxation and the remaining three mentioning alcohol in passing [211]. In 1998, reportage was found to be predominantly factually correct, yet episodic and lacking in meaningful background context [164]. A 1999 study covering seven years of reportage (n=1,677 items) found some improvement, with the supposed benefits of alcohol rarely mentioned, while negative effects were accurately represented, with such problems situated as issues in need of public health solutions, rather than as the dependency of an individual [208]. However, that study found mention of alcohol policies in only 38% of items, and moreover, there was little coverage of the particular policy under investigation, suggesting that though the public health
context was reported it had yet to be linked effectively with policy solutions. One study found minor differences in policy reporting between national newspapers which were more likely to cover economic alcohol policies, and local community newspapers which focused more on restricting alcohol advertising, due to a recent campaign run in the community [207].

Examination of newspapers in the US also included student newspapers, where stories mentioning alcohol and drugs were collected for analysis. Of those stories, one in two discussed alcohol issues, as opposed to one in five stories discussing drugs [210]. Student newspapers covered the legal, health and social problems associated with alcohol and drug use, yet there was little coverage of treatments. Half of the articles discussed alcohol policies, but this was mostly limited to law and order interventions. A later study in 2009 followed up on college drinking and examined coverage of the issue in 32 newspapers with circulation in large US cities, including both national and metropolitan newspapers [209]. They found that though evidence-based policies were mentioned, by far the most frequently reported strategy was ‘increasing student knowledge’, along with other non-evidence based approaches, suggesting there is still some way to go in highlighting effective policies as solutions for alcohol problems.
A 2002 study examined the influence of frequency, prominence and framing on news media reports about alcohol policies in the late 1990s [212]. In 1,885 news articles, the most frequently occurring alcohol news topic concerned trauma and injury, present in a quarter of all articles, followed by alcohol advertising (21.9%) and drink-driving (16.6%). Around one fifth of the sample focused on alcohol related prevention and health and of the news frames deployed, 24% were thematic, 58% episodic, and 17% included a mixture of both. While alcohol polices were mentioned frequently, they were mostly focused on drink-driving measures. Like earlier studies [164], they concluded that “most articles mentioning alcohol lack important contextual information that would enable the reader to draw appropriate conclusions regarding solutions to alcohol related problems or issues” (p186) [212]. Later research in 2006 on a nationally representative sample found that drugs and alcohol were mentioned in the context of violent crime and injuries at a relatively low rate relative to epidemiological estimates of their involvement, perhaps contributing to the public underestimating the risks associated with alcohol consumption [213]. This was echoed by a 2008 paper examining 2002-2003 news media reports of intimate partner violence: epidemiological estimates suggest alcohol is involved in up to two thirds of such incidents, yet alcohol use was mentioned in only 5% of stories and thematic framing was present in just 11% [214].
In the same year, 954 newspaper articles concerning cancer emphasised tobacco and diet over alcohol and sun exposure as modifiable cancer risk factors [215].

One study focused on the presentation of particular groups over time in news reports about alcohol. Examination of news portrayals of pregnancy and alcohol between 1977 and 1996 found that prior to 1987, in keeping with the government beginning to warn about the dangers of drinking during pregnancy and as a risk for everyone, portrayals of pregnant women were most likely white, middle class. However, after 1987, these portrayals shifted focus to minority women, with narrative suggesting that such women were ‘dangers to society’ if they continued to drink [216].

However, there are some examples of successful media advocacy. In 1994, a community trial examined news coverage of alcohol issues and the effect of training media advocates in four key areas of alcohol prevention policy. They found an increase in news reports about drink driving incidents and an increased public perception of their personal risk of being caught in the experimental local communities [217]. They concluded that policy advocacy in local news media was more effective than using the mass media to deliver paid advertisements and public service announcements. Follow up analyses reported that such increases in news
coverage of alcohol issues can help community leaders to focus on very specific approaches to policies in order to reduce alcohol related injuries [165].

One study attempted to quantify the relative influences of media attention to binge drinking and the introduction of legislation on rates of binge drinking in young people [148]. The authors found an increase in news media attention to binge drinking in the studied years and the number of young people concerned about binge drinking increased, with a similar decrease in the number reporting involvement with binge drinking. However, the study concluded that attention to media was merely a contributing factor to the greater effect of an increase in legislation designed to address the problem. Likewise, a similar study of news coverage of drink driving, related behaviour and policies introduced between 1978 and 1995, found that while there was an increase in news media reports about drink driving, this only indirectly affected actual drink-driving behaviour through support of the introduced policies [218]. Despite the reported conclusions, it is likely that news media reporting and changes to legislation and alcohol policies work synergistically, making it difficult to measure the effect of a single contributing factor.
Outside of US research, researchers examined Finnish press reports on alcohol policies [219]. An examination of six daily newspapers between 1993 and 2000 identified ‘main storylines’ concerning alcohol. Between 1993 and 1997, storylines mainly concerned the ‘liberalisation of alcohol policy’ where news content focused on opposition to the public health arguments for more stringent measures. At the end of this period, news content argued that though liberal policies did not promote ‘civilised drinking habits’, stronger alcohol control policies were not the solution. Instead, another main storyline emerged involving arguments that police should be afforded ‘more resources’ and institutional power to deal with problematic drinking in public and that ‘parents should be made more responsible’ for the drinking behaviour of young people.

The most recent research from the UK [220] looked at newspaper reports, advertisements and television news concerning alcohol between 2008 and 2009. They found that violence was the most commonly occurring theme, followed by negative impacts on health with a particular emphasis on damage to the liver, and appearances by public health professionals as the primary source of information. However, the news did not show any consensus on alcohol policies, with reported opposition to measures such as minimum pricing of alcohol. Likewise, they reported successful attempts by the Prime Minister to frame problems related to alcohol as
individual choices, coupled with the use of *vox populi* interviews which expressed public disapproval of policies. In the case of newspapers, the authors suggested that even successful attempts to frame the public health angle in stories could be countered by the presence of discount alcohol advertisements.

In Australia, analysis of television news coverage of health stories over four years found that alcohol and other substance use was ranked eighth among 21 health-related categories in terms of the frequency with which they appeared in the news [155].

In summary, most previous research has focused on news framing of alcohol stories, with most findings reporting a high presence of stories related to trauma and injury. While some stories reported on alcohol control policies, this was often presented in the absence of context that would help audiences to understand the links between alcohol consumption, injury, crime and the solutions proposed. Where policies were discussed in greater detail, they more often emphasised drink-driving countermeasures, or failed to report accurately on evidence-based policies. While there has been some improvement in reporting the problematic aspects of alcohol consumption, the basic findings and recommendations are that more media
advocacy by public health experts is essential to place alcohol policy solutions on both the news’ and the community’s agendas.

**Audience responses to the news on alcohol**

While there has been research into the presentation of news on alcohol, relatively few studies have specifically examined the response of audiences to television news reports concerning alcohol policies, with this review identifying only six studies.

An early 1998 study with 134 school children aged 13-17 years gave students 13 statements about alcohol, drinking and health and asked them to rate their level of agreement with each statement. The students were then divided into four groups: one received news stories about alcohol that were only negative, a second group received news stories about alcohol that were only positive, a third group received both positive and negative stories, while the fourth group acted as a control and received no news stories. After reading the news stories, they were asked to rate the 13 statements again, with results showing that students who received only negative stories became significantly more negative in response to the statements and vice versa for those who received positive stories [221].
A later 2008 study, also with school-aged children, used a questionnaire to assess the relationship between self-reported exposure to news, music videos and action movies, and their intentions regarding traffic related risk taking, such as speeding [222]. On the whole, girls perceived speeding and drink driving as more dangerous than boys and this was significantly associated with watching news broadcasts. These findings were echoed later by the same authors investigating audience thoughts about ‘joy riding’ and speeding, which found similar relationships between gender, perceptions of danger, and intentions to take risks in traffic [223].

A study in 2007 used a telephone survey which asked the following key questions: “how much attention do you pay to news stories about (a) motor vehicle crashes; (b) crime; (c) attacks and other violent crimes; and (d) non-motor vehicle incidents like falls, fires, or drowning?” These questions were followed by asking participants to rate their level of concern: “how concerned are you about the problem of attacks [motor vehicle crashes and incident such as fires, falls, drowning, and electrocution that are caused] by people who are under the influence of alcohol?” and “how concerned are you about such an attack [crash-incident] happening to you or someone you know?” (p364) [224]. They found that adolescents perceived greater risks from alcohol, such as non-intentional injury, the more they paid attention to news stories about accidents and crimes [224]. Overall exposure to news in general
was not predictive of this, but the reported level of attention paid to particular stories was the key predictor. Those who were younger, or who had never been drunk, reported more perceived risks, and young women reported more perceived risks than young men. However, among adolescents who scored higher on measures of ‘sensation seeking’, perceptions of personal risk from alcohol was lower. This study concluded that there was low coverage of accidents and crime and that more frequent coverage would be needed for those ‘sensation seekers’ to pay attention to the messages.

Similarly, attention to the same type of coverage as mentioned above was also found to be predictive of audience support for particular alcohol policies, namely new laws and alcohol advertising restrictions [225]. That is, paying greater attention to stories about crime, accidents and assault affected the level of concern people had for alcohol related problems and whether they perceived solutions were needed in the form of policies. This study concluded by re-affirming the position taken in previous research [164, 226, 227] that media advocacy for alcohol policies needs to focus on increased thematic coverage of alcohol problems in order to present a public health angle and make the links between accidents, crime and alcohol more explicit in news stories for audiences.
Only one study was identified that examined direct audience responses to stories about drink-driving enforcement, in the form of written comments on internet pages of online news articles [228]. An online search identified 56 relevant articles, yielding 615 posts from readers in response to the articles, where the majority of comments (57%) chiefly took a neutral tone while talking about enforcement of drink driving laws. Just under a quarter of responses were negative in tone, while 19% of responses were overtly positive about law enforcement, and they found objections were likely to be voiced in terms of personal rights, disbelief about the motives of those enforcing laws and a reported belief that it was not a ‘real’ crime [228].

**AIMS OF THE THESIS**

In light of the previous research reported here, this thesis aims to extend the research by providing insight into the Australian news media context with special emphases on alcohol pricing and advertising. I will:

- Describe and critique television and newspaper news coverage of alcohol, with a view to providing current information about the status of alcohol policy in news reports
- Describe the policy priorities of alcohol experts and advocates who provide commentary to news media
• Describe audience understandings of alcohol policies and their response to news reports about alcohol pricing and advertising policies
CHAPTER 4: AUSTRALIAN TELEVISION NEWS COVERAGE OF ALCOHOL, HEALTH AND RELATED POLICIES, 2005 TO 2010: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY ADVOCATES

PUBLISHED WORK

This chapter was published in 2012 as follows:


Aust NZ J of Publ Heal 36:530-6.
ABSTRACT

Objective: To describe television news coverage between 2005 and 2010, of alcohol, health and relevant alcohol control policies, with a view to informing policy advocacy.

Methods: A content analysis of all alcohol stories archived by the Australian Health News Research Collaboration. We recorded what triggered a news item, the main topics covered, whether risks to health were communicated, whether alcohol-control policies were featured and which news actors appeared.

Results: We identified 612 stories, where 69.2% were triggered by a particular news-worthy incident or the release of new findings. The most frequently reported alcohol stories were focused on associated harms (30.2%) and ‘binge drinking’ (19.0%). A majority (75.3%) reported a variety of positive and negative health effects, yet mainly focused on short-term consequences. Combined, 63% mentioned an alcohol-control policy, yet no one particular policy was featured in more than 10% of all stories. The most commonly featured news actors included public-health professionals (50.0%), affected communities (28.4%) and government representatives (24.3%)

Conclusions: Problems related to alcohol were well-established foci of news attention and reportage covered a broad spectrum of issues related to public health
goals, yet less coverage centred on long-term health consequences or effective policy solutions.

**Implications**: Future policy advocacy could focus on moving the debate away from simple problem definition to better communication of long-term health risks, existing policies, and evidence of their effectiveness and arguments for their adoption. Future research might consider audience understanding of the information.

**Key words**: alcohol, content analysis, policy, television news
INTRODUCTION

Alcohol use in Australia is associated with a range of harms and social costs [11, 13, 16, 229]. With apparent per capita consumption increasing [4] and many Australians reporting drinking patterns that place them at risk of short and long term harm [5], health and medical bodies have long called for the introduction of alcohol control policies [105, 110, 230].

Two recent reviews agreed on the need to adopt a comprehensive range of policy interventions [36, 39]. Broadly, these policies consist of (i) regulating the availability of alcohol through restrictions on sales and licensed venues; (ii) reducing demand for alcohol through increased taxation of high alcohol beverages and/or preferential tax arrangements that favour lower alcohol drinks; (iii) deterrence of drink-driving; (iv) provision of treatment and early intervention services for problematic drinking; (v) greater regulation of alcohol advertising and promotion; (vi) education and persuasion strategies that provide health information (e.g. product labelling, drinking guidelines) or increase awareness of the risks and the de-normalisation of practices like drink driving; and (vii) altering the drinking context to reduce harms (e.g. alcohol-free events, use of plastic glasses, training staff in responsible service).

These represent current policy priorities for Australia that are largely consistent with
the World Health Organisation’s global strategy to reduce alcohol-related harms [38].

In Australia, the current policy environment is arguably favourable for alcohol control reform, given the formation of a National Preventive Health Agency [57], a National Binge Drinking Strategy [231] and the National Drug Strategy [40] which all prioritise responding to harmful alcohol use. Additionally, during 2008 there was the political will to introduce and pass a tax aimed at ready-to-drink spirits (“alcopops”), despite considerable drinks industry and media criticism [232].

However, effective alcohol-control policies are not always popular, with differences in the support depending on the policy being proposed. A recent review found that most Australians supported targeted licensing restrictions and regulating advertising, but not taxation and pricing measures [233]. Likewise, Australians supported harsher penalties for drink-driving, but were less sure about restricted trading hours [234]. There are also differences between groups, with licensees being unsupportive of policies approved by police and the general public [235]. Furthermore, the wine industry plays an increasingly large role in the Australian economy [236], thus additionally politicising the introduction of policies. Together, these factors mean proposals to introduce new alcohol-related policies are highly
contested and rapidly become the focus of considerable scrutiny, debate and lobbying, where a range of voices vie to influence the discussion [237].

Such debates invariably play out in the news media, which has a pivotal role in determining how issues are framed and defined for the public and policy-makers [121, 238], highlighting certain aspects of a story while leaving out other information. This process has considerable implications for wider media effects [129], including questions about how biases in framing might exert different influences [238] and affect public perception of particular issues [239]. Broadly, news coverage has been shown to influence the attitudes and behaviours of both consumers and policy makers, as well as influencing policy agendas and the decisions of those in power [150, 166, 240-243]. Conceptual models recognise these effects and have informed advocacy for strategic news coverage of health issues like problematic alcohol consumption to advance policy goals [164, 165, 170]. This interaction between policy goals and news media is reflected in the views of influential advocates in various fields of public health, who report recognising and attempting to harness the power of the news [244].

Health is a leading news category in Australia, with alcohol and other substance use ranking eighth among all health-related television news categories [155], suggesting
opportunities for such media advocacy and relevant research studying its effects. Considerable research has examined alcohol’s representation in popular television programs, movies, magazines and advertisements [177, 181, 186, 193, 245-247] and focused on links between exposure to alcohol advertising and subsequent drinking patterns, particularly among the young [203, 248-252]. However, there has been relatively little focus on the coverage of alcohol by news media [204], with most early research focused on framing of alcohol stories and their relevance to health and policy or association with trauma and accidents [207, 208, 212].

Later research from the USA suggests alcohol’s role is under-reported in stories about crime, violence and injury, perhaps negatively affecting public support for policy [213]. However, among those who do pay greater attention to news, there is slightly higher support for policies [225] and attention to news has been found to be predictive of adolescents’ judgments about alcohol-related risks [224]. There is some limited evidence that news emphases on risky behaviours like drink-driving is associated with the prevalence of drink-driving incidents [218]. More recently, UK research found that public health advocates are key sources in news reporting about alcohol. UK reports emphasised negative outcomes and long term health impacts, and featured an apparent gender divide, where drunk males were often reported as violent, while drunk females tended to be reported as being just drunk [220].
Given that television news programs can reach audiences of millions [253] and play a substantial role in shaping or reflecting community concerns, television news reports about alcohol should be an important focus of study by those seeking to become more potent participants in policy debates about alcohol. If new policies to reduce risky alcohol consumption and related harms are to be introduced into a context where ‘boozing’ is part of the national identity [254], public acceptance of these policies will be mediated by many factors, with news reports playing a vital role.

This paper provides the first Australian data on television news reportage of alcohol, with emphases on (1) whether health effects of alcohol consumption are mentioned, (2) whether alcohol-control policies are discussed in the news and (3) the type of news actors featured in health-related alcohol stories. Implications for policy advocacy are then explored.

**METHOD**

The Australian Health News Research Collaboration (AHNRC) is a project funded to investigate health news reporting and audience interpretations of health-focused content on television. The data platform of the collaboration indexes and archives
all health-related news items broadcast on Sydney’s five main free-to-air channels [255]. The data presented in this paper are part of a sub-study focused on alcohol reportage.

We searched the then 26,299 item AHNRC database for all items subject tagged with “alcohol” for the period May 3, 2005 (the inception of the database) to December 31, 2010 (latest data available at analysis). All items are indexed with descriptive titles of each news item, up to three areas of content coding, and the names of people and organisations featured. Programs indexed include news bulletins, current affairs programs and general health “infotainment” programs.

**Measures**

Based on previous research regarding alcohol [212, 220], a list of broad content areas was developed and trialled on 50 items. The coding was then refined to eliminate categories for which there were no examples and others added that were not initially anticipated but arose from the data with enough frequency to warrant coding [256]. Upon completion of coding the entire sample, we ensured the 50 trial items were coded the same way and included them in the final sample.
Primary coding was completed by author AF and inter-coder reliability was assessed via three coding exercises. We used a random number generator to select a sample of 65 clips to detect Kappa with a null value of .40 at 90% power [257].

The following variables were coded for each news clip:

**Trigger:** we noted what had apparently triggered each news story. This included the release of reports, new research or statistics; specific incidents such as alcohol related road trauma; reports based on seasonal themes (e.g. dealing with Christmas hangovers or holiday drink-driving police blitzes); stories about new awareness campaign launches; alcohol dependency treatments; policy proposals to deal with alcohol-related issues; and journalist-initiated stories not apparently triggered by any of the preceding.

**Main topic:** we recorded up to two main alcohol-related content foci per story, including binge drinking; health effects; alcohol-related harms; product labelling; advertising; drinking guidelines; alcohol-based taxation; legal drinking age; celebrity alcohol use; random breath testing and drink driving; links to sport; education and awareness-raising; consumption patterns; licensing and regulation; ready-to-drink spirits; alcoholism and treatments; economic consequences; as well as a miscellaneous category for stories that did not fit within these categories.
**Health effects**: we recorded any alcohol-related health effects that were reported in each story and classified whether these effects were reported as being positive or detrimental to health or a combination of these; whether they were specific to unborn or breast-feeding babies; associated with an increased risk of injury, violence, accident or death; and whether alcoholism or dependence was mentioned.

**Alcohol related policy**: we recorded whether any alcohol-control policies were mentioned in each story. In addition, we noted how often policies identified as priorities for Australia [39] appeared and recorded them under the following headings: regulation of the availability of alcohol; taxation and pricing measures; drink driving counter-measures and other law and order; regulation of advertising and promotion; drinking guidelines; product labelling; and education and persuasion strategies. Where policies were mentioned that did not fall into these categories, we still recorded the item as mentioning a potential policy, but these cases were rare.

**News actors**: We recorded the types of news actors present in each clip, including sports stars; politicians (current and former); adversely affected communities; public health specialists; drinks industry representatives; celebrities; police; judiciary; Non Government Organisations; and the general public.
RESULTS

Across the study period, the database search returned 752 relevant items. After initial viewing, 131 were excluded on the basis that alcohol was mentioned only peripherally or not at all (e.g. a report from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre would be returned by the search, yet be about methamphetamine). A further nine stories were identified as related to alcohol, but were excluded because the video files were lost or corrupted due to a hardware crash. The remaining 612 stories (2.36% of all items on all health issues) constituted the data for this study.

The inter-coder reliability exercises produced kappa scores of 0.76 for main alcohol related content, 0.76 for health-effects of alcohol and 0.81 for alcohol-related policies, indicating substantial agreement [256-258].

Triggers

The most common trigger for news stories were particular incidents (34.6%, n =212; e.g. footballer George Best’s death after long history of alcohol abuse) or the release of new research findings and published reports (34.6%, n=212; e.g. “drinking guidelines being reviewed after a study found that a third of babies are being put at risk because their mothers drink too much during pregnancy”). The remaining stories
were triggered by announcements of new proposals (6.0%, n=37; e.g. “South Australia is set to introduce the country’s toughest drink spiking laws...” or “...new proposal tonight to lift the drinking age...”) and campaign launches (7.0%, n=43; e.g. a story about ‘Feb Fast: banish the booze for one month’ campaign), while others were apparently journalist-initiated (5.4%, n=33) or related to seasonal events like Christmas (7.0%, n=43; e.g. hangover cures for the ‘silly season’). In only a small minority, was it unclear what triggered broadcast (5.2%; n=32).

Focus of alcohol-related content

The most frequently occurring topics concerned alcohol-related harms, binge drinking, Indigenous health (largely due to the 2008 Federal Government “Intervention” [259] in the Northern Territory and associated bans on selling take-away alcohol) and the effects of alcohol on health (Table 4.1).

Health effects

Of the 612 news items reported, 75.3% (n=461) included some mention of alcohol-related health-effects (even if the main focus of the story was on something else) – see Table 4.2.
Table 4.1: Main alcohol-related themes in N=612 broadcast news items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Alcohol-related harms</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Binge drinking</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Indigenous health</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Health effects of alcohol</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ready-to-drink (RTD) spirit mixes and high energy drinks</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Alcohol consumption rates and patterns</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Age issues (e.g. legal drinking age, underage drinkers)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Random breath testing and/or drink-driving</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Celebrity (e.g. celebrity in treatment due to alcoholism)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Alcoholism and treatments</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Drinking guidelines</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Labelling of alcoholic products (e.g. information and warnings)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Licensing, regulation and law and order</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Liquor industry</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Education and awareness-raising activities</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Alcohol advertising</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: categories are not mutually exclusive, column totals will not add to 100%. ‘Other’ includes items where there were 10 or less stories recorded e.g. drink spiking, nutrition, economics, taxation policies etc.
Table 4.2: Reported alcohol-related health effects in N=612 broadcast news items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health Effect</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased risk of violence, injuries and death</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>33.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative health effects – acute (e.g. vomiting, hangovers, confusion, sick</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>days, interaction with prescription medicines)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol dependence</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative health effects – long term (e.g. brain damage, increased risk of a</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>range of cancers, liver disease, developmental delays etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative health effects of maternal alcohol consumption on unborn or</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>breastfed babies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative health effects – unspecified</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive health effects (e.g. heart protection)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various health effects (e.g. alludes to both positive and negative effects in</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one story, or a lack of clarity with regard to health effects)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive, column totals will not add to 100%: each story could be coded for up to two kinds of alcohol-related health effect.

Twenty five reports (4.1%) mentioned health benefits said to be associated with drinking alcohol. There was little distinction made between short- and long-term positive effects of alcohol in news reports – but most mentioned that the benefits occurred with light to moderate drinking only. (E.g. “low level drinking, as little as half a drink a day 4 times a week can confer some benefits, probably best established for heart attacks that are caused by clots in small arteries of the heart...”).
A much larger focus (n=203, 33.2%) on negative health impacts included hospitalisation for injuries incurred while intoxicated (e.g. “70000 Australians are hospitalised because of booze... a year”) or reports of violent assault and unintentional injuries (e.g. an emergency room doctor commenting “… we had half a dozen people who came in, who are still there in hospital with a drip, or bleeding... because of assault on a Tuesday” and the head of research in crime statistics “… about one in 20 were assaulted by somebody under the influence of alcohol...so that gives you some sense of how big the problem is...”). Negative health effects were often reported as acute and/or short term and included topics like hangovers, absenteeism, vomiting and confusion.

Longer term negative health effects reported links between alcohol consumption and increased risk of developing a range of cancers, brain damage, cognitive problems and long-term dependence. (E.g. “The World Health Organisation has linked alcohol to 1.8 million deaths, cancer, liver disease, epilepsy, brain damage and motor vehicle accidents." and "if you start drinking at heavy levels when you are young you are likely to go on having that pattern of heavy drinking for life"). Long term negative health effects of alcohol consumption also included the effect on unborn, or breast fed babies, focusing on developmental delays or incidence of
fetal alcohol syndrome (e.g. “alcohol exposure can cause abnormality with the baby and that can happen even with occasional exposure…”).

Alcohol control policies

Of the 612 news items broadcast, 63% (n=383) mentioned alcohol-control policies. These stories did not necessarily endorse or oppose such policies, often just mentioning them (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3: Alcohol control policies mentioned in N=612 broadcast news items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regulating availability of alcohol</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use persuasion based education and awareness campaigns</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drink driving countermeasures, law and order, licensing restrictions</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking guidelines</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxation and pricing measures</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labelling of alcohol (e.g. increased information and/or health warnings)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising the legal drinking age, penalties for supply to underage people</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulation of advertising and promotion</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment and emergency room services</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive, each story could be coded for up to two kinds of alcohol policy.

The most frequently mentioned alcohol policy involved those that would reduce or ban the supply of alcohol by reducing its availability (e.g. "new pressure tonight for
some types of pre-mixed drinks to be banned because of concerns they give
teenagers a taste for alcohol” and “The groups want the federal and territory
governments to ban take away alcohol sales two days a week and make it more
expensive”) and included calls to reduce ‘happy hours’, increase policing and
promote venue lockouts because of extended alcohol trading hours (e.g. "experts
warn that extended pub hours make the problem worse"). Some reports featured
news actors contesting the policy (e.g. "...as he's fighting for life, the newly
refurbished Beresford Hotel is fighting council for longer trading hours...one
kilometre away from St Vincent’s where doctors are overwhelmed by binge
drinking...").

Other frequently mentioned policies included a range of education and awareness
campaigns (e.g. Dry July) and an emphasis on drink-driving countermeasures, often
featuring members of the police force in seasonal stories about the ‘silly season’.

Drinking guidelines also featured, including calls for clearer guidelines about drinking
during pregnancy (e.g. “Currently pregnant women are advised to drink no more
than seven standard drinks a week and no more than two a day but the AMA and
opposition parties want the guidelines changed to no alcohol consumption at all”), or
guidelines for general consumption (e.g. "health authorities recommend no more
than four standard drinks a day for men and two drinks a day for women - heavy social drinking can cause executive damage") and elaborated on the link with reducing harms generally (e.g. "if people stick to these guidelines we'll see fewer alcohol problems, we'll see fewer hospital beds occupied by people due to drinking, we'll see a safer community with less violence, less drink driving"). Additionally, there were requests for more specific guidelines for particular scenarios (e.g. "parents should rethink the advice to gradually expose teenagers to alcohol" and "parents say the situation won’t improve until there are accepted guidelines on what to do if teenagers ask for alcohol at home").

There was mention of taxation and pricing measures to reduce consumption (e.g. "...price levers are extraordinary and we know they work" and "[alcohol is] too cheap, too available and over-promoted, advertising needs to be checked") as well as calls for the adoption of health warning labels and the need to provide more information (e.g. "... the head of the Australian Medical Association has backed calls for warning labels similar to those on cigarette packets to be placed on alcohol bottles. His comments come in response to alarming figures released by the Salvation Army showing most Australians are unaware of the link between alcohol and an increased risk of cancer").
Less featured were policies concerning the minimum purchase age, regulation of alcohol promotion, and provision of treatment services for dependent users, which were mentioned in less than 5% of the sample.

*News actors*

Public health professionals (e.g. doctors, researchers, drug and alcohol specialists etc.) were the most frequently used news actors, appearing in just over half of all stories, followed by members of affected communities (Table 4.4).

**Table 4.4: News actors represented in N=612 alcohol-related news items**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News actor category</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public health professional</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affected community (e.g. patients, victims, etc.)</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government politician or representative</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of non-government or community-based organisation</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of the police or judiciary</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition or independent politician</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liquor industry representative</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-public health experts (e.g. author)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General public (“person in the street”)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sportsperson</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: categories are not mutually exclusive*
DISCUSSION

The data provide a previously un-researched overview of Australian television news reportage of alcohol and health over a five year period. Advocates of alcohol-control policies can be encouraged in the knowledge that alcohol reporting is frequent and covers a broad spectrum of issues related to public health goals, including information about risks to health and possible policy responses to reduce harm. This places advocates in a better position than those involved with many other health issues, where coverage is scant and simply raising awareness of issues still presents major challenges.

Alcohol is commonly a focus of news attention, providing many opportunities to participate in debates and reiterate pertinent messages, similar to UK findings [220]. Table 4.4 shows that the frequency of public health news actors providing commentary for news stories dominates the appearance of news actors from the drinks industry. Together (n=674 appearances), voices from public health authorities, affected community representatives, NGO representatives, the police and judiciary were nearly 14 times as common as representatives from the drinks industry (n=48) in news discourse about alcohol. Experts and policy advocates are featured in a majority of news reports, suggesting that journalists see their
commentary as an almost mandatory part of most stories on alcohol, with police appearing more frequently in more recent years.

The two most common routes for alcohol to become news stories included either the release of new research findings, or alcohol’s role in a newsworthy incident, and together these accounted for nearly three quarters of all triggers recorded. Given these triggers and the opportunities for advocates to provide commentary, the twin challenges remain: (1) how policy advocates can attract the attention and trust of journalists seeking commentary on breaking news relevant to alcohol policy [164, 170], and (2) how advocates can more effectively harness the news media’s appetite for “incident” and “statistics” triggered news to move news coverage “upstream” to focus more on the importance of policy reform for prevention and service provision [165, 171]. The narrow life cycle of most news stories means that alcohol policy advocates wanting to influence the debate need to give high priority to rapidly responding to breaking news stories. If organisations and staff are not oriented towards rapid response capacity or giving high priority assistance to journalists, crucial windows of opportunity can close quickly, given the short nature of the news cycle.
In addition to the importance of opportunistically reacting to breaking news, our findings also point to opportunities for policy advocates to become more active in releasing reports to the media and thus breaking news stories. As about 35% of all news stories were triggered by the release of new research and statistics, policy advocates should continue to publicise upcoming reports. Secondly, the life cycle of stories triggered by new findings could be further prolonged by the strategic release of commentaries on others’ research or newly released state, national or international statistics, ensuring further debate, a strategy that has worked in tobacco control [260] and some community-based alcohol projects [165]. Such continuing engagement with the media regarding the need to implement a broad range of effective prevention strategies and the existing evidence base would allow the debate to move beyond simple definition of the ‘problem’ of alcohol and reinforce that ‘solutions’ are available, as advocated elsewhere [164] and perhaps building community support for policies that are currently unpopular. While a news item might be focused on a particular incident, this represents an opportunity to provide more information about general drinking patterns and subsequent health effects.

A large majority of alcohol-related coverage referred to the adverse health effects of alcohol, or even featured these as the main focus of the story. The largest category
of reported health effects concerned the association between alcohol consumption and injuries, deaths and violence, followed by considerable mention of acute health effects of alcohol and to a lesser degree, the risks of dependency. Only a minority of news stories reported on the putative positive effects of alcohol consumption and even then, all stories stressed that these benefits only occurred with low to moderate consumption levels, perhaps in deference to the controversial nature of such claims [261].

By contrast, long-term health effects were seldom reported. This focus on the acute effects reflects Australian mortality data where more people die from acute effects of alcohol than long-term or chronic effects [39]. However, only a tenth of items mentioned longer-term negative health effects (e.g. cancer) which can arise from even slightly higher than moderate consumption of alcohol. This absence represents a potential challenge and opportunity for policy advocates, especially given the confusion around safe drinking guidelines reported in our sample. There is perhaps a gap between experts’ technical knowledge of alcohol’s long-term health risks and the general public’s knowledge, which media advocacy might help to address through continued commentary on such risks, how to reduce them and who is most likely to be affected by them.
In Australian television news reportage, alcohol is therefore largely already problematised: the sub-text of most news on alcohol is that it causes health and social problems. Iyengar’s (1991) work on the structure of news and its framing of responsibility would thus suggest that when it comes to news, the fundamental proposition about alcohol is that it causes problems and that something should be “done” about it [142]. We found little evidence of any news actor groups – including the drinks industry – contesting that alcohol caused problems, but compared to the frequency of such stories, extended focus on policy solutions were relatively uncommon. One limitation of the current study is that it does not include pay television channels.

With the exception of coverage of alcohol availability and awareness campaigns, Table 3 shows that while some kind of alcohol policy was mentioned in a majority of clips, no single alcohol control policy was mentioned in more than 10% of items, with some issues like advertising and promotion controls receiving very low coverage. This may reflect the many challenges to implementation that have already been identified [262] and hint at a lack of consensus among advocates concerning policies whose effectiveness are not as strongly established as say, limiting alcohol availability and taxation. Calls to lift the drinking age, for example, remain contentious within the field and there is an absence of extended debate about
precisely how alcohol advertising might be regulated, despite agreement that it is a key factor to be addressed. Reaching a consensus that is akin to that which has long occurred regarding tobacco advertising and more recently, about ‘junk food’ advertising targeted at children [262], would seem to be an essential step before media advocacy can assist in communicating and reinforcing key messages.

More specifically, the documented public disapproval of universal policies like taxation [233] and our findings that alcohol taxation is discussed in only 10% of stories over five years suggests a content area for policy advocates to target. Rather than focusing public discussion on policies that already enjoy high public support (e.g. education programs), news media advocacy might consider future attempts to raise public understanding of exactly how the more unpopular policies work to achieve the greatest reduction in harms that audiences see reported on a regular basis. Future research might consider examining the issue of expert consensus on contested policies and the way forward, with a view to providing a united voice for action in media advocacy.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We acknowledge Simon Holding for his compilation and indexing of the television news database and Kevin McGeechan for statistical advice.
CHAPTER 5: FRAMING AND THE MARGINALISATION OF EVIDENCE IN MEDIA REPORTAGE OF POLICY DEBATE ABOUT ALCOPOPS, AUSTRALIA 2008-09: IMPLICATIONS FOR ADVOCACY

PUBLISHED WORK

The data presented in this chapter were published as follows:


Implications for advocacy. Drug Alcohol Rev:569-76

Running head: alcopops tax, evidence and media reportage
ABSTRACT

Aims: to investigate news reportage of the contested Australian 2008 ‘alcopop tax’ on ready-to-drink spirits (RTDs), with emphasis on the treatment of evidence of the tax’s effect on consumption rates. (The tax had caused rapid and sustained reduced net alcohol consumption of 2.7% and 26.1% for RTDs).

Design and methods: Content analysis of 536 articles from Australian newspapers and 33 Sydney television news items. All items were coded for the presence of rhetorical frames, the total number of statements per item that corresponded with each frame and the group identity of news actors making the statements.

Results: Four principal frames were identified: consumption reduction, substitution effects, revenue-raising and closing a tax loophole. Only 22.2% of statements included evidence regarding the tax’s effect on sales and consumption. A significantly higher proportion of statements supporting the tax included evidence (29%) compared with statements opposing the tax (15%).

Conclusion: Public health advocates should be mindful of how evidence can be marginalised in contested policy debates. The direction and rhetorical appeal of counter-argument needs to be anticipated in strategic planning of the communication of alcohol control policies.

Key words: content analysis, news media, alcopops tax,
INTRODUCTION

For the past decade, ready-to-drink (RTD) alcoholic drinks, or ‘alcopops’, have been an international concern [263-266]. While it is difficult to establish that RTD consumption is associated with higher rates of negative consequences than consumption of other alcoholic drinks [266-268], alcopops have attracted attention due to their marketing [269] and reputation for appealing to immature palates [270].

It has been reported by some media that Australia has the world’s highest per capita consumption of RTDs [271]. In April 2008, concerned about alcohol-related costs [13, 16], the Australian Government increased by 70% the excise applied to these drinks:

As part of our ongoing efforts to tackle binge-drinking, particularly among young people, the Rudd Government has reversed a decision of the previous government which allowed ‘alcopops’ or ‘ready-to-drink’ (RTD) beverages to be taxed at an inappropriately low rate...

Since the lower rate was applied in 2000 the market for RTDs has grown significantly. These beverages have become increasingly popular, including among males and females aged 14 to 19 years.

[272]
The ‘lower rate’ of tax referred to the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2000, which resulted in RTDs being taxed at a substantially cheaper rate than straight bottled spirits, stimulating the market for RTDs. The Government saw closing this loophole as a means of decreasing RTD consumption by young people with limited revenue. Australian tax law allows for \textit{ad hoc} increases in excise duty without parliamentary approval, provided enabling legislation is introduced within 12 months. The Government thus framed the increased consumption of RTDs [273, 274] and their marketing to young people [269] as a serious health issue open to amelioration by a tax increase – a position hereafter referred to as the “consumption reduction” argument.

Around 1 in 5 Australian teenagers consume alcohol weekly and about 9% of 14 – 19 year olds report consumption that place them at risk for short- and long-term harm [275]. In the ten years to 2002, an estimated 2,643 deaths and over 100,000 hospitalisations in young people were attributable to alcohol [276], trends that are increasing in some places [11]. Among young high risk drinkers, 75% report drinking RTDs and liqueurs [274].

Increases in alcohol prices are associated with reductions in consumption and alcohol-related harm [92, 95, 277, 278]. An Australian review concluded that alcohol taxation represents a cost-effective intervention with potential to reduce social costs of alcohol consumption by a range of $2.2 billion to $5.9 billion [44].
The 2008 alcopops tax increase generated immediate controversy [279] and prompted two Senate Inquiries [65, 66]. Sections of the alcohol industry opposed the tax, along with the Federal Opposition, while some minor party and independent senators whose votes were critical expressed reservations about passing it into law [280, 281]. After the Opposition and one independent voted against the measure, the tax was blocked by a single vote in March 2009 [282], only to be resurrected and eventually passed in August 2009 [283].

The tax caused a net fall in total alcohol consumption On August 14 2008, a year before the bill was passed, the Federal Minister for Health stated that “early data shows there has been an overall reduction in consumption as a result of our measure” [284]. This effect was predicted by international evidence [95, 277, 278] and affirmed the Senate Committee’s recommendation to impose the tax as one part of a broad strategy [65]. Subsequent analyses of Nielsen Liquor Services Group and Australian Tax Office data confirmed that total consumption of alcohol had decreased in the period May to July 2008 [285]. When compared with the same period in 2007, RTD consumption had decreased by 26.1% (91 million standard drinks) and while some substitution did occur (spirit consumption increased by 11.2% and beer consumption increased by 1.5%) the net effect was an overall reduction in total alcohol consumption of 2.7% or 64 million standard drinks [285]. More recent data (to the end of June 2009)
indicate this pattern has held, with a 30.2% decline in RTD consumption, with minimal beer (1.7%), wine (2.2%) and spirit (13.4%) substitution, representing a net decline of 0.14% in total alcohol consumption and a reversal of a four-year trend of steadily increasing consumption [286]. We note however, that longer-term analysis is required, along with analysis of the impact of other relevant variables known to affect consumption [39, 287].

However, given the early data, our impression was that media coverage gave infrequent emphasis to this evidence, and we sought to test that hypothesis by exploring the protracted news media debate as a case study of a highly contested public health policy. This paper examines newspaper and television coverage of the RTD tax with particular focus on how evidence of the tax’s impact on consumption was utilised, contested or ignored during the period in which the alcopops tax was debated. While alternative proposals for taxing alcohol (e.g. a volumetric tax) have arisen in public discussion, this media case-study will focus on the particular alcopops tax that was before Government.

Given the reach of news media, the high frequency of health-related news [155], its ability to influence consumer behaviour [150] and policy makers [241], its role in public agenda-setting [117] and in some cases, media actively campaigning on particular health issues [288], critical analyses of contested framings employed in public health debates are essential for public health advocates wishing to
become more potent participants. Entman’s description of how framing “select[s] some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient... in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation” [121] emphasizes how dominant framings can come to define what an issue is “about” and conditions public perceptions of the appropriate political response to that issue.

METHOD

We used the Factiva database to collect coverage in 13 Australian capital city newspapers. We also viewed all television news and current affairs items covering the tax recorded by the Australian Health News Research Collaboration’s unique database [155]. We examined the period 27 April 2008 (introduction of the tax) to 30 August 2009 (its eventual assent in Parliament).

Items included news, features, editorials, opinion pieces and all television news and current affairs items. Items related to the alcopops tax were identified via key word searches (alcopops; RTDs, binge drinking/youth). Items were included if they referred to the tax in the context of public health, youth “binge drinking” or Australia’s alcohol culture and were excluded where coverage related to overall budgetary or political analysis without discussion of health.
Measures

Because news frequently involves coverage of “both sides” of contested debates, they frequently contain both supportive and critical statements about issues. Our analysis therefore did not consider news items as a whole, but analysed at the level of all direct or attributed statements about alcopops taxation within news items. All items were therefore coded for the presence or absence of any statement in favour of or against the tax. The direction of these statements were always self-evident but the concordance of making this judgement was tested via an inter-rater reliability test of 50 randomly selected items where four other coders’ judgements were compared with author AF’s coding. A statement was any direct (X said “Y”) or attributed (“X said that...”) quote, or direct argument made by the author of the piece. We coded neutral statements where (for example) the author restated the Government’s intention to pass the bill and the reasons for introducing it.

Statements used in favour of the tax were categorised as exemplifying the following broad frames:

- **Consumption reduction**: any framing of the tax as a health measure; any mention of the relationship between RTD consumption, binge drinking, young people and price sensitivities; any neutral report of the tax change which accorded with the Government’s description
- **Loophole**: any framing of the tax as designed to close the loophole created after the GST’s introduction in 2000

Statements used in argument against the tax fell broadly within the following frames:

- **Substitution**: any framing of the tax as ineffective, or counter-productive, because of substituting RTDs with cheaper forms of alcohol or drugs

- **Revenue raising**: any framing of the tax as a ‘tax grab’ or revenue raising for the Government, often accompanied by dismissal of binge drinking statistics and possible health benefits

There were a small number of other rhetorical frames but these were infrequent and discarded if they failed to constitute 10% of all statements being made (e.g. a “double dissolution” frame asserting that the Government was using the tax as a trigger for a double-dissolution election occurred only 34 times in 569 items).

In addition, items were assessed for whether any evidence was reported in support of assertions made about the tax’s effectiveness. Finally, we examined who were the proponents for each of the arguments, noting statements made by various interest groups and tested whether particular arguments were more likely to be made by members of particular groups.
RESULTS

In total, 569 news items were identified (536 newspaper articles and 33 television items) which together contained 1,654 relevant statements. No significant differences were found between print and television items. Table 5.1 shows the number of statements in favour of, or opposed to, the alcopops tax. The Kappa inter-coder agreement score for 50 randomly selected statements was 0.85 indicating excellent agreement [258].

Table 5.1: Summary of statements for or against the ‘alcopops tax’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARGUMENTS FOR</th>
<th>N=1,654 statements</th>
<th>Print</th>
<th>TV</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consumption reduction</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing loophole</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ARGUMENTS AGAINST

- Substitution | 29.7 | 27.6 | 29.5 |
- Revenue raising | 18.0 | 18.6 | 18.1 |

TOTAL

100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0

(\text{n=1,498}) | (\text{n=156}) | (\text{n=1,654})

Advocates’ arguments

Statements supporting the tax as a legitimate preventive health measure, or neutrally framing the issue in accord with the Government’s position, accounted for 52.4% (\text{n=867/1654}) of all statements recorded.

The majority of these supporting statements (88.6%, \text{n=768/867}) referred to the need to address alcopop consumption by young people (e.g. “It is well
established that alcopops play a major role in hooking girls on drinking.

Something needs to be done to reduce the attractiveness of alcopops to girls.”

Health Minister Nicola Roxon, 27 April 2008) [289] and the utility of the taxation system to do so (e.g. “Utilising the taxation system is one of the most effective measures we have for reducing alcohol-related harm, and problems for both individuals and communities.” John Herron, Chairman of the National Council on Drugs, 18 June 2008) [290]. A further 11.4% (n=99/867) of supporting statements made explicit reference to closing the tax loophole (e.g. “The $27.31 per litre tax hike on the pre-mixed drinks would bring them into line with spirits and other alcohol and close a loophole from legislation introduced in 2000.” 27 April 2008) [291].

Opponents’ arguments

Of all statements, 47.6% (n=787/1654) explicitly dismissed or ignored the proposed health benefits of the tax, claiming it would be ineffective or counter-productive. Of these opposing statements, 62.0% (n=488/787) considered that substitution was or would be the likely outcome, whether in relation to cheaper forms of alcohol (e.g. “Far from reducing the amount of alcohol consumed, the tax has turned many RTD drinkers to drinking bottles of spirits at significantly higher alcohol-content levels.” Stephen Riden, Distilled Spirits Industry Council, 28 July 2008) [292]; “…the move would only encourage greater consumption of cheaper options like cask wine” West Australian Democrats Senator Andrew
Murray, 30 April 2008) [293] or less commonly (n=22 statements), other recreational drugs (e.g. “People tell me the price rise has made illicit drugs more attractive, which is a real concern.” Ian Horne, Australian Hotels Association, South Australia, 21 June 2008) [294].

Of all statements opposing the tax, a further 38.0% (n=299/787) referred to the revenue raising potential of the tax and disputed the need for intervention (e.g. “But the ‘crisis’ isn’t as great as the Health Minister portrayed and it does mean we should suspect the Government’s real agenda. The tax hike on pre-mixed drinks will yield $500 million for the next four years. That’s a lot of money for a new Federal Government with election promises to keep…” Jeremy Sammut, Centre for Independent Studies, 30 April 2008) [295]. The move was characterised as a tax-grab by both politicians and liquor merchants (e.g. “This is nothing more than $3 billion of an alco-con which is falsely misleading people into believing that this will deal with the problem... arguably will make it worse.” Brendan Nelson, Liberal politician 19 May 2008, [296]; “They are hiding behind a blatant tax grab and they are letting down all Australians,” Families First Senator Steve Fielding, 16 March 2009 [297]; “…When asked to select a message they would like to send to the Federal Government about the tax increase, 13 per cent of respondents said it encouraged people to buy stronger spirits, while 9 per cent said it was merely a tax grab” survey of liquor retailers, 9 September 2008 [298]).
**Use of evidence**

Of all statements recorded, 22.2% (n=368/1,654) incorporated any supporting data, with 15.0% (n=248/1654) related to consumption reduction. These statements reported decline in RTD sales alone (e.g. "...sales of the drinks... have dived by as much as 39 per cent in one month since the tax was introduced.” 29 May 2008 [299]), or a net effect of reduced alcohol consumption overall, even with some substitution occurring (e.g. “... there were 54 per cent fewer sales of RTDs in June compared with April and 7 per cent more sales of full-strength spirits, leading to an overall decrease of 23 per cent....” 29 July 2008 [300]). In contrast, 7.3% (n=120/1654) related to substitution (e.g."... sales of pre-mixed alcoholic beverages fell almost 30 per cent between the April tax hike of 70 per cent and June, but bottled spirits sales rose by just under 50 per cent, leading to an overall increase in spirit sales of more than 10 per cent” 29 July 2008 [300] and “...the complete failure of the controversial RTD tax trial has been exposed... An extra 21 million standard spirit drinks, or 266,000 litres of alcohol, were sold after the introduction of the 70 per cent tax increase.” 28 July 2008).

Statements in support of the tax were significantly ($\chi^2$ = 41.01, p<.001) more likely to include supporting evidence (28.6%, n=248/867) when compared with all statements opposing the tax (15.4%, n=120/787).
**Emphases by different news actors**

Table 5.2 shows the proportion of statements made by representatives of various interested parties. At the level of statement, consumption reduction arguments were significantly more likely ($\chi^2=518.2$, $p<.001$) to be made by representatives of the Government (46.2%, $n=355/768$), followed by public health experts (23.6%, $n=181/768$) and reporters (17.8%, $n=137/768$). Note: for testing purposes we included the Opposition and Independent senators in one group. Due to lower numbers we did not statistically test the loophole argument.

The substitution position was most often stated by the liquor industry (41.2%, $n=201/488$), followed by reporters (19.5%, $n=95/488$) and *vox populi* statements (13.8%, $n=68/488$). These differences were significant ($\chi^2=403.1$, $p<.001$).

**Table 5.2: Breakdown of the arguments made by interested parties**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Consumption reduction* (%)</th>
<th>Loophole (%)</th>
<th>Substitution* (%)</th>
<th>Revenue raising (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liquor industry</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public health</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vox populi</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporter</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

($n=768$) ($n=99$) ($n=488$) ($n=299$)

*p<.001 (note: we considered opposition and independent senators as one group for significance testing)
DISCUSSION

Public health seeks to advance evidence-based policies with population-wide potential to improve health. Scientific evidence is empirically valid and reliable data, obtained through transparent means, yet this narrow definition is not that through which ordinary people make sense of the world. News discourse about public health problems is rarely confined to examination of such narrowly defined evidence; and in policy debates, efforts to frame problems and solutions using evidence compete with contesting framings of what is said to be at issue [171]. This was very much the case during the alcopops debate, where government and expert health news actors’ efforts to frame alcopops as drinks facilitating binge drinking in young people were contested by drinks industry framings depicting the tax as naive because of substitution and as a duplicitous tax grab.

Australian Tax Office data demonstrated that claims by opponents that substitution would override positive effects of the tax, or perhaps be counter-productive and increase consumption, were over-stated and inaccurate [285, 286]. However, while the first three months of the tax saw a 2.7% fall in net alcohol consumption, some substitution did occur.

There was an 11.2% rise in spirit sales [285] and while some of this increase may have been seasonal variation [301], or due to marketing [302], it nevertheless
allowed for recounting of concrete examples of substitution experienced by those witnessing the policy debate, and lent credibility to the claims of the tax’s opponents. A publican saying that while his RTD sales might be down, his spirit sales were noticeably up provides memorable, “authentic” evidence of apparent policy folly. By contrast, the net reduction in total national alcohol consumption was not something that anyone could appreciate on the basis of personal experience. This information could only be obtained via Government statistics - impenetrable, counter-intuitive and possibly untrustworthy when considered against the authenticity of commonly recounted direct experiences of substitution.

It is unclear how often advocates and opponents sought to include evidence in their contact with journalists, but less than a quarter of published and broadcast statements incorporated supporting evidence. Reportage of those supporting the tax included evidence more often (nearly 30%) than that of those opposing the tax (less than 20%). Audiences would have thus more often encountered evidence-free assertions and anecdotes. This allowed the potential “killer fact” [303] of the tax’s early established effectiveness to be marginalised, allowing the debate to continue as if substitution remained an open question, when data demonstrated that for the most part, substitution was not significantly neutralising the net effect of the tax. Our results show that parts of the liquor industry used this to their advantage, as they were the group who most
frequently advanced the substitution argument throughout the course of the debate.

Despite this, the Government was reasonably successful in framing a change to the tax system as a health measure focused on problematic RTD consumption, with a majority of all articles mentioning this framing and just under half of all statements being relevant to this point of view. However, it was rare that this argument went unchallenged. Public opinion is not shaped in direct proportion to the quantity of exposure to competing arguments, so it would be unwise to claim that the Government arguments dominated in a persuasive sense simply because they were more frequent. Ultimately, only audience research studies could illuminate how the public consumed this debate.

However, it is likely that the public assessed claims being made against the perceived trustworthiness of the news actors involved [304, 305]: publicans, industry representatives, politicians and public health advocates, all of whom were represented in the data. Unlike many public health debates [155], we saw no examples of victim advocates urging policy reform, an absence which may have made opposing the tax easier.

Opponents sought to undermine the trustworthiness of Government news actors by reframing the motive for the tax rise as a tax grab. In concert with stories
about substitution, the tax grab narrative positioned the Government as naive, duplicitous and venal, a potentially potent combination. Another problem was that alcohol sales clearance data are not broken down by gender or age and so did not allow the question of whether the tax specifically affected binge drinking in young people to be answered conclusively [66, 306].

Implications for advocacy

Public health policy advocacy seeks to influence the way that political decision makers and the public see events and issues. The core problem of politics has been described as being one of the struggle for ascendancy among multiple definitions of the same events [307]. Here, opponents of the alcopops tax sought to define it as being a misconceived move that would (1) not reduce problem drinking (2) cause substitution and (3) was being introduced as a cynical tax grab. We see five broad lessons arising from our study for advocates of evidence-based policy seeking to ensure that policy debates are dominated by resonant, supportive debating frames.

First, it is vital to first build a compelling case for the seriousness of the problem being addressed by a new health policy. Here, the Government’s case was challenged, allowing for the suggestion that the move was a manufactured moral panic to dignify a tax-grab. Scepticism in this case was predictably voiced by the opposition and alcohol interests, but also by some libertarian social
commentators. Plainly, developing a coherent and consistent account of the problem is an essential first step in any policy advocacy, together with preparation of rebuttals to arguments anticipated to be used in discrediting the scope of the problem.

Second, under-playing of the available “killer facts” [303] that (a) alcohol tax has a track record in reducing consumption in other contexts [95] and (b) that it had reduced net alcohol consumption in the first three months after implementation [285] may have given the substitution argument far more traction than necessary. The substitution position offered strong intuitive credibility, particularly when reinforced by “authentic” anecdotes. Consumption-reduction could seem counter-intuitive without supporting data.

Third, the Government could have anticipated that the data available to bolster their case did not address specific rates of binge drinking in young women and RTD consumption [66, 306]. Two options could have been considered. Firstly, commissioned research immediately following the tax rise could have helped address the Government’s stated concerns about young people’s drinking. Alternatively, if they had instead framed their position as a strategy to reduce general consumption, the argument would not have been as open to avoidable criticism.
Fourth, while news bulletins occasionally featured the views of young drinkers about the impact of the tax (mostly saying they would substitute by mixing their own), there was no use of the “victims” of problem drinking such as those injured or assaulted or their grieving relatives. The most common news actors seen in Australia health news are those experiencing the health problem being described [155]. Victim advocates have been prominent in many public health stories and bring indisputable credibility to public debate, with opponents being unable to contradict their lived experience at the risk of displaying insensitivity.

Finally, the debate was reduced to consideration of a single strategy: the alcopops tax alone. Almost no coverage acknowledged the strategy was just one measure being considered by the Government [39]. For example, public health advocates have suggested the introduction of a volumetric tax based on percentage alcohol would have a more direct effect on harmful consumption [92]. If the Government had demonstrated serious consideration of other relevant alcohol taxation policies, the alcopops tax may not have been as vulnerable to criticism as a sole strategy. While we have focused here on the arguments for or against the alcopops tax, perhaps greater emphasis by the Government on other measures also being considered may have reassured sceptics that this measure was not merely about collecting revenue.
Acknowledgements

Tanya Chikritzhs and Kevin McGeechan for advice on the manuscript
CHAPTER 6: ADVOCATES, INTEREST GROUPS AND
AUSTRALIAN NEWS COVERAGE OF ALCOHOL ADVERTISING
REstrictions: CONTENT AND FRAMING ANALYSIS

PUBLISHED WORK

The data presented in this chapter were published as follows:


KEY WORDS

Alcohol policy, content analysis, news reportage, advertising restrictions
ABSTRACT

Background: Legislating restrictions on alcohol advertising is a cost-effective measure to reduce consumption of alcohol. Yet Australia relies upon industry self-regulation through voluntary codes of practice regarding the content, timing and placement of alcohol advertising. Ending industry self-regulation was recommended by the National Preventative Health Taskforce; a suggestion contested by the drinks industry. Debates about emerging alcohol-control policies regularly play out in the news media, with various groups seeking to influence the discussion. This paper examines news coverage of recommendations to restrict alcohol advertising to see how supporters and opponents frame the debate, with a view to providing some suggestions for policy advocates to advance the discussion.

Methods: We used content and framing analyses to examine 329 Australian newspaper items mentioning alcohol advertising restrictions over 24 months. All items were coded for mentions of specific types of advertising and types of advertising restrictions, the presence of news frames that opposed or endorsed advertising restrictions, statements made within each frame and the news actors who appeared.

Results: Restrictions were the main focus in only 36% of 329 items. Alcohol advertising was conceived of as television (47%) and sport-related (56%). Restrictions were mentioned in non-specific terms (45%), or specified as restrictions on timing and placement (49%), or content (22%). Public health
professionals (47%) appeared more frequently than drinks industry representatives (18%). Five supportive news frames suggested the policy is a sensible public health response, essential to protect children, needed to combat the drinks industry, required to stop pervasive branding, or as only an issue in sport. Four unsupportive frames positioned restrictions as unnecessary for a responsible industry, an attack on legitimate commercial activities, ineffective and ‘nannyist’, or inessential to government policy. Support varied among news actors, with public health professionals (94%) more supportive than the public (68%), community-based organisations (76%), the government (72%), and the sports (16%), drinks (3%), or advertising (4%) industries.

**Conclusion:** Restrictions on alcohol advertising currently have low newsworthiness as a standalone issue. Future advocacy might better define the exact nature of required restrictions, anticipate vocal opposition and address forms of advertising beyond televised sport if exposure to advertising, especially among children, is to be reduced.
INTRODUCTION

A significant proportion of Australians consume alcohol at levels risky to personal and public health and safety [5, 33]. Accordingly, addressing problematic consumption of alcohol has been given high priority for action, with best practice recommending universal interventions that target the whole population, rather than intervening with just high-risk drinkers [39]. Such interventions aim to reduce net alcohol consumption, producing attendant reductions in alcohol-related harm, and are evaluated as cost-effective [36, 39, 44].

Thus, attention has focused on the need for policy reform of alcohol advertising and promotional activities [308-310], with emphasis on young people [311] and sport-related sponsorships and branding [312, 313]. While there is considerable research estimating children’s and adolescents’ exposure to alcohol advertising in movies [193], television programming [314, 315], magazines [197] and even student publications [316], there is still debate over the evidence regarding alcohol advertising’s relationship with consumption [317, 318]. Research conducted in the 90s suggested no strong link between advertising expenditure and consumption patterns at a general population level [319, 320]. However, among young people, increased exposure to alcohol advertising is positively associated with later consumption patterns [200, 252, 321, 322], which can vary according to regional differences in advertising budgets [323]. A 2009 review of longitudinal studies found “consistent evidence to link alcohol advertising with
the uptake of drinking among non-drinking young people, and increased consumption among their drinking peers” (p 242) [324]. Young people like alcohol advertisements, with likeability positively related to their intentions to purchase the advertised product [250]. While watching alcohol advertisements, young Australians report perceived messages “that alcohol consumption leads to social and other success, increases confidence and attractiveness...” (p350) [325] and alcohol advertising promotes sexual stereotypes [186].

Within this context, sustained calls to restrict alcohol advertising and regulate promotion using legislation have emerged in the public health community [38, 39, 44, 46, 110, 230], who point to the success of advertising restrictions in tobacco control and the cost-effectiveness of partial bans or restrictions [44]. Unlike tobacco, not all use of alcohol is considered harmful, yet it has been argued that there are enough similarities that lessons from tobacco control could potentially be usefully adapted for alcohol [326].

Current restrictions on alcohol advertising in Australia are not legislated but are voluntary and self-regulated by the drinks industry via the Alcoholic Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC) [327] and the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) Advertiser Code of Ethics [328]. These agreements state that alcohol advertisements must not, for example, encourage binge-drinking, or appeal to children, or link social and sexual success with alcohol consumption.
For television broadcasts, advertising must also comply with the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice (CTICP)[329], which prevents alcohol being directly advertised on television before 8.30pm, yet a major exemption exists for live sports broadcasts. Complaints about alcohol advertisements can be made to the Advertising Standards Board (ASB). Advocates for greater regulation point out that internal documents from alcohol companies show advertising strategy is aggressive and runs counter to the spirit of self-regulated codes [330]. Other criticisms include that voluntary codes fail to prevent underage exposure [314]; companies deliberately target youth with promotional activities anyway [315]; there are numerous examples of non-compliance with existing guidelines [196, 331, 332]; and that in Australia, boards who review complaints about advertisements, do not agree with members of the general public [333] or independent experts [334], that alcohol advertisements have breached the guidelines in the voluntary codes. In most of these regards, similarities have been noted between the alcohol industry and the tobacco industry [326].

The Alcohol Working Group of the Australian Government’s National Preventative Health Taskforce (NPHT) recommended regulating alcohol promotion to reduce consumption [39, 56]. These recommendations were largely in concert with those of the World Health Organisation [38] and confined to television advertising and event sponsorship, as follows:
“In a staged approach, phase out alcohol promotions from times and placements which have high exposure to young people aged up to 25 years, including:

- Advertising during live sports broadcasts
- Advertising during high adolescent/child viewing
- Sponsorship of sport and cultural events

Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the voluntary approach to alcohol promotions

Introduce independent regulation through legislation if the co-regulatory approaches are not effective in phasing out promotions from times and placements which have high exposure to young people up to 25 years.”

As elsewhere, alcohol control policies in Australia have been highly contested, with policies targeting the whole population rather than problem drinkers being unpopular [233, 234] or only supported by specific groups in the community such as police, while licensees oppose the policies [235].

Debates about alcohol control policies regularly play out in Australian news media, and the way the various arguments are framed by participants in these debates is critical to how different audiences understand and evaluate the issues involved and who is responsible for change. According to Entman [121] “to frame
is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.” Framing leaves some aspects of issues absent or in the background, highlighting particular “preferred” ways of seeing [122]. Interest groups interacting with news media seek to assert their framings of the meaning of issues and incidents and to re-frame dominant narratives that have become established [113, 335] and which are unconducive to legislative or policy reform.

Considerations of newsworthiness, journalists’ personal values and the accessibility of spokespeople all affect story selection and how it is approached [113, 335, 336], as well as the ways in which different audiences interpret the meaning of news [143, 337]. Thus, news frames can directly affect public perception and awareness of issues and influence health-related behaviour [150].

In alcohol control, an array of interest groups comment on policy proposals and vie for their interpretations to be heard and to dominate the way these issues are characteristically treated by media and understood by audiences [232, 237]. Given the unpopularity of some alcohol-control policies as well as the high proportion of the population that consumes alcohol, news reports of such policies are bound to be highly contested. For health advocates who participate
in public conversations regarding alcohol, recognition of factors that ultimately influence audiences’ evaluations is crucial to more strategic framing of policies as legitimate concerns and targets for reform.

Alcohol receives prominent news coverage in Australia [232, 338] and in this paper we review coverage of proposals to restrict alcohol advertising and promotions before and after the release of recommendations in the NPHT’s report [39]. We were interested in the extent to which the NPHT report may have stimulated news coverage, how advertising restrictions were framed by news actors appearing in the news, who supported and opposed such restrictions, and whether these news frames reflected patterns that have been observed in the field of tobacco control.

**METHODS**

Using the Factiva news database, we reviewed news coverage and commentary on alcohol advertising and promotion in 13 Australian national and capital city newspapers for two 12 month periods immediately before and after September 1, 2009, when the National Preventative Health Strategy was launched. We also examined all television news and current affairs coverage of the same issue on five free-to-air Sydney television stations over the same period, using the digital database of the Australian Health News Research Collaboration [255]. For newspapers, we searched news, features, editorials and letters to the editor.
Items were identified using the search keywords: alcohol, advertising, promotion and policy. All items located were then read or viewed for the inclusion of any mention of restrictions on advertising or proposals to regulate its promotion. Items that mentioned alcohol, but not advertising policy were excluded, as were those that mentioned other alcohol-control policies unrelated to alcohol advertising.

We analysed coverage at two levels. The first was a descriptive content analysis of the news items [256], summarising the alcohol advertising and restrictions mentioned. The second level of analysis was guided by framing theory [121, 122, 339] and identified particular news-frames used within each article to explain any proposal to restrict or regulate alcohol advertising. Details of each analysis are expanded below.

Primary coding was completed by author ASF and inter-coding reliability was assessed by a second coder (SH) via two coding exercises. The first exercise examined inclusion or exclusion of 25 randomly generated items to test the reliability of decisions regarding excluded items. A second exercise assessed reliability of framing decisions on a randomly generated sample of 15% of all statements recorded.
Content analysis

A content coding sheet was developed and trialled on 20 news items outside of the study period. We defined alcohol advertising as including traditional media (e.g. television advertisements), new media (e.g. viral marketing), and promotional activities (e.g. sports sponsorship) [36, 39].

The following variables were coded for each item:

- Main focus: whether advertising restrictions were the main, or only a secondary focus of the item
- Forms of advertising: whether advertising was referred to in general terms or whether specific kinds of advertising was mentioned (e.g. television ads or sporting sponsorship)
- Restrictions mentioned: whether restrictions were mentioned in general terms, or whether certain types of restriction were specified (e.g. restrictions on advertising content or restrictions on the frequency or placement of advertisements)
- Advertising organisations: whether mention was made of advertising and/or marketing organisations or peak bodies administering advertising codes
- ABAC scheme: whether any item mentioned the drinks industry’s voluntary advertising code
• NPHT reports: whether the items mentioned the National Preventative Health Taskforce’s report [56] or its alcohol working group’s technical report [39]

• News actors present: Recorded the presence of the following news actors: government representatives, public health professionals, drinks industry, advertising industry, law enforcement, non-government and community-based organisations, reporters, general public (vox populi)

Framing

Following Terkildsen et al [335], articles were coded for salient issues relevant to restrictions on alcohol advertising and whether the frame was supportive or unsupportive of the proposed restriction. News frames were defined by arguments made for or against introducing greater restrictions on alcohol advertising, with particular outcomes either stated or implied (e.g. lower consumption, no effect, etc.) by the coverage.

Within each frame, we recorded statements and coded which news actors from particular interest groups made the statement. A statement was any direct quote (X said “Y”) or attribution (“X said that...”) by a news actor or a direct argument made by a journalist. We assessed the distribution of identified frames across the coverage and support for alcohol advertising restrictions within interest groups.
RESULTS

Our broad search strategy returned 1,101 newspaper items. Of those, 70.1% (n=772/1,101) were excluded, as described above. We also found only eight television news reports mentioning alcohol advertising restrictions. Given the very low volume of relevant television reports, we focussed only on newspaper coverage for our detailed results. Three hundred and twenty nine newspaper articles were therefore used as the basis for this study. Of those 329 articles, 186 occurred in the year before (hereafter ‘pre’) the release of the National Preventative Health Strategy and 143 in the year after (hereafter ‘post’) the release.

Assessment of inter-coder reliability using Cohen’s Kappa [257] produced scores of 0.92 for inclusion criteria and 0.74 for coding of statements indicating excellent and good agreement respectively [256-258].

Note: during the analysis we discovered that in the year preceding the release of the National Preventative Health Strategy, 27.4% (n=51/186) of newspaper articles mentioned alcohol advertising restrictions only in passing in relation to a particular policy debate. At the time, the ‘alcopops tax’ [232], which aimed to increase the tax rate on pre-mixed alcoholic drinks, was being debated in parliament and one independent Senator initially made his support for the tax conditional upon the government introducing legislation to restrict television
advertising of alcohol during live sports broadcasts. Mention of advertising restrictions in this context consisted of only one or two sentences, while the majority of each article focused on the tax. Due to the often-reported Senator’s concern for breaking links between alcohol advertising and sport, we have included these articles in the analyses as an example of how policies are discussed publicly. However, we contend that without the pre-existing media interest in the contested alcopops tax, alcohol advertising restrictions might never have received this level of coverage. Accordingly, in results tables, we report data for the “pre” period in two ways: (i) all newspaper articles included and (ii) all newspaper articles, excluding those articles related to the alcopops tax.

We report data in text for the full 24 months of coverage. Full pre and post figures are found in tables.

**Main focus of news items:** Advertising restrictions were the main focus in 35.9% (118/329) of articles on alcohol. Where they were not the main focus, restrictions were situated within broader contexts such as items on alcohol and associated harms in general (18.5%; 61/329), or prevention of diseases related to tobacco, obesity and alcohol (11.6%; 38/329). (Table 6.1)

**Types of advertising mentioned:** The most commonly mentioned form of advertising was advertising or promotion related to sport (56.2%; 252/329). This
included concerns like sponsorship of teams or events, advertising during live broadcasts and field banner advertising. After sport, the focus was most commonly on television advertising (46.8%; 154/329) and point-of-sale promotions (15.8%; 52/329). Additionally, though mentions of promotion at festivals and cultural events was small overall, there was a significant increase in mentions of such advertising between the first and second year of coverage (pre 2.7% versus post 12.6% p<.001; (Table 6.1).

**Type of restrictions proposed:** Just under half of all items (45%; 148/329) mentioned ‘advertising restrictions’ without stating what kind of restrictions they meant. A higher proportion (48.9%; 161/329) of items mentioned specific restrictions on timing and placement of alcohol advertisements (note, these are not mutually exclusive categories)(Table 6.1). While mentions of each kind of restriction were similar between the two time periods, the proportion of articles referring to restrictions on timing and placement significantly decreased in the second year of coverage (p<.001).

**News actors:** Public health professionals were the most frequent news actors (47.4%; 156/329), followed by government representatives (46.2%; 152/329), the drinks industry (18.2%; 60/329) and the general public (17.3%; 57/329). Less common were representatives of the advertising industry, non-government and community-based organisations, and police, lawyers or judges. (Table 6.1).
A small proportion of articles (8.8%; 29/329) mentioned the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code and only 11.2% (37/329) referred to advertising organisations and peak bodies such as the Advertising Standard Bureau, the Australian Association of National Advertisers, or the Australian Communication and Media Authority. During the second year of coverage, one third of articles (33.6%; 48/143) mentioned the NPHT’s reports.
Table 6.1: Summary - mentions of specific advertising channels, types of advertising restrictions and the news actors present in each story before and after the Preventative Health Task Force Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of advertising discussed</th>
<th>PRE (n=186)</th>
<th>POST (n=143)</th>
<th>PRE EXCL. ALCOPOPS (n=135)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sport – general</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>46.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television advertising</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point-of-sale promotions (e.g. happy hour, discounted alcohol)</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport – specific teams (e.g. cricket, AFL)</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Festivals/cultural events (e.g. ‘schoolies’ week, Big Day Out)</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet, social network websites and online viral marketing</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public space advertising (e.g. billboards, public transport)</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinema advertising and product placements</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio advertisements</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER (e.g. video games, music videos, information booklets)</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of advertising restrictions or regulations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified, general</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>49.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing frequency of and exposure to advertising</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>40.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total ban on all forms of advertising</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrictions on content</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News actors present</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public health professional</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>51.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government representative</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liquor industry</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vox populi</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising and/or marketing</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-government or community-based organisation</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law and order</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: categories are not mutually exclusive.
News-framing of alcohol advertising restrictions by interest groups

From 329 news articles, 1,322 statements (pre n=814; post n=508) were identified which were relevant to alcohol advertising restrictions and formed the basis of our framing analyses. We identified ten prominent news frames that accounted for the majority of coverage. Five frames were supportive of advertising restrictions, four unsupportive and one neutral, or voicing new ideas about the current policy proposal (Table 6.2). Table 6.3 shows the proportion of each news actor group that was supportive or unsupportive of advertising restrictions.

Supportive news frames

Advertising restrictions as a sensible public health response

This frame depicted advertising restrictions as a sensible societal response to problematic alcohol consumption, emphasising the policy as part of a comprehensive package of policies such as increased taxation, shorter trading hours and stronger policing of alcohol related violence. Restrictions were positioned as effective tools in a larger suite of preventive policies and practices. Such framing echoed a larger preventive health context, often discussing alcohol as part of a ‘big three’ set of problems: alcohol, tobacco and obesity. Advertising restrictions were promoted as effective and feasible, given the success of similar policies in tobacco control, where it was implied that lessons could be adapted
for alcohol. Sometimes such framing would refer to the case for advertising restrictions as self-evident and obvious, without further justification.

*Advertising restrictions as essential to protect the young – “think of the children”*  
Advertising restrictions were often framed as concern for youth: as something from which more vulnerable members of society should be protected. It was often illustrated by indignant claims about targeting children such as placing billboard advertisements near schools or sponsoring music festivals. Such framing accused the drinks industry of deliberately using characters and promotional material that would appeal to children and young people, for example the anthropomorphic “Bundy Bear” rum advertising, or decorated hipflasks sold in a store frequented by girls. These items often included demands that greater regulation of advertising to young people be implemented immediately.

*Advertising restrictions necessary to combat disingenuous industries*  
This frame saw restrictions on alcohol advertising as essential to counteract the behaviour of the drinks and advertising industries, which were positioned as variously insincere, duplicitous and dishonest. Such framing was largely cynical about the value of industry self-regulation, emphasised the size of advertising budgets and the conflict of interest between reductions in advertising and
commercial imperatives to maximise profit. The notion of corporate responsibility for harms associated with their products was often expressed.

**Advertising restrictions as essential to controlling pervasive branding and promotion**

Here, alcohol advertising was characterised as pervasive across cultural events, relentless in its frequency and messaging, constantly ‘pushing the limit’ by promoting socially acceptable stereotypes of drinking as normative. For example, the pairing of a “raise a glass” campaign with the Returned Serviceman’s League on ANZAC day was seen as alcohol advertising infesting yet another iconic cultural space. Branding and promotional activities were framed as wielding too great an influence in public spaces and as inescapable in a 24/7 culture.

Advertising restrictions were thus positioned as a vital and necessary counter to the power of advertising and the emphasis here was not so much on achieving health goals, as on reducing the scope, frequency and ubiquity of advertising.

**Advertising restrictions necessary in sport**

This news frame positioned alcohol advertising as problematic mostly in relation to sport, whether professional sporting codes (e.g. cricket, rugby) or local community-based groups with historical reliance on funding from the drinks industry. Support for restrictions in this frame was articulated as the need to end
messages linking sporting success with alcohol. This frame emphasised that television alcohol advertising curfews were ineffective when exemptions were made for live sports broadcasts and that something should be done about this. This framing focused on changing attitudes towards sporting success and acceptance of alcohol’s place within the sporting arena.

**Unsupportive news-frames identified**

*Advertising restrictions: unnecessary for a responsible industry*

In this news frame, advertising restrictions were positioned as unwarranted by a responsible drinks industry that was said to be already actively managing alcohol risk. Such framing emphasised existing guidelines as more than adequate, raised examples of the industry reacting swiftly to complaints and policing its own promotional material, denied that the industry caused harm directly or targeted children and stressed their importance to community as funders of events. This angle sought to re-frame the public health position on advertising restrictions as unnecessary punishment of moderate drinkers for the behaviour of a few people and cheap political point-scoring at the industry’s expense.

*Advertising restrictions as an attack on legitimate commercial activity*

This frame suggested that introducing greater regulation of alcohol advertising would be an attack on the advertising industry. Negative consequences such as job losses, erosion of commercial freedom, the stifling of creativity, and negative
impact on the economy were highlighted. Such framing included calls to lobby the government directly to oppose the policy. No mention was made of alcohol-associated harms and supporters of restrictions were derided as seeking a “quick fix”.

*Restrictions as ineffective and ‘nannyist’*

Here, advertising restrictions were deemed ill-conceived and ineffective. This was often taken to be self-evident, with no argument advanced. Where explanation was offered, the policy was dismissed as poorly-targeted and statements asserted that alcohol advertising does not affect consumption and that consumption was more proximally influenced by other factors, like price. Such framing predicted that that the policy would be automatically rejected by the public as an example of the “nanny state” needlessly interfering with people’s choices. In keeping with this assertion, members of the public often stated that the government was too bound by vested interests or political donations to even consider it, regardless of whether they personally supported or opposed the policy.

*Government re-framing restrictions as unnecessary*

This frame occurred in a relatively small proportion of coverage, as it was dependent on two particular incidents. During the first year of coverage, an independent Senator advocated strongly for the legislation of advertising
restrictions in return for supporting the government’s alcopops tax. This was rejected by the government. Similarly, during the second year of coverage, the government responded to the NPHT suggestions regarding alcohol advertising and again rejected legislating changes, electing instead to pursue a “voluntary and collaborative” approach with the drinks industry [340]. Thus, for a short period in each year, the government positioned advertising restrictions as non-urgent.

**Neutral framing and new ideas**

A small proportion of statements on alcohol advertising did not either support or oppose advertising restriction (for example, a suggestion about creating a levy on the advertising budgets of the drinks industry to be used variously to fund treatment services, counter-advertising educating people about the harms of alcohol).

**Interest groups and news actor support for advertising restrictions**

Table 6.3 shows the number of statements made by each news actor group within news frames that supported or opposed advertising restrictions. A majority of statements made by public health news actors (93.9%); the public (68.1%), members of non-government or community based-organisations (76.4%) and government representatives (71.9%), were supportive of restrictions on alcohol advertising, while nearly all statements made by representatives of
the drink industry (95.9%), the advertising industry (93.9%) or sporting organisations (84.3%) were unsupportive.

Public health actors were most likely to frame arguments supporting advertising restrictions as sensible public health (29.5%) or a necessary response to the disingenuous drinks and advertising industries (20.5%), while government representatives were more likely to frame their support around concern about alcohol advertising in sport (31.7%). Although members of the public supported restrictions on the whole, the most frequently deployed news-frame was an argument that policies to restrict advertising are ‘nannyist’ (25.3%). News actors in the drinks industry emphasised their already responsible industry (93.9%), as did sporting organisations (77.1%), while representatives of the advertising industry most frequently emphasised their commercial activities (51.0%) as legitimate enterprises.
Table 6.2: Distribution of different frames across the coverage (N=1,322 statements)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUPPORTIVE FRAMES: Advertising restrictions as....</th>
<th>PRE</th>
<th>POST</th>
<th>PRE EXCL. ALCOPOPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The sensible public health response e.g. &quot;First, the Government needs to ban alcohol advertising, especially on television, as was done for tobacco&quot;</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Necessitated by the disingenuous drinks industry e.g. &quot;...industries will never agree to effective controls on their irresponsible promotions&quot;</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Indispensable counter to pervasive advertising culture e.g. &quot;Now I have seen it all, an Australian Digger and Victoria Cross winner used to market beer&quot;</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Crucial in sport e.g. “four out of five people wanted to see an end to alcohol sponsorship in all local sports clubs, provided there were funds to replace the lost revenue.”</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Necessary protection for children e.g. “Should alcohol advertising be banned? No, certain types should be, such as those that particularly target young people. I’m a wine drinker so I like to learn about different varieties from their ads.”</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Total supportive</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNSUPPORTIVE FRAMES: Advertising restrictions as...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Overkill and unwarranted for a responsible drinks industry that contributes to the community e.g. &quot;In terms of responsibility, we are absolutely like any other promoter out there in ensuring that we’re doing everything we can...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pointless, ineffective, politically unfeasible and nannyist e.g. &quot;it’s our right to rejoice in the pleasures of Aussie family life and mateship over a drink or two, and we should resent having that right trampled by do-gooder politicians and nanny-state troopers&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• An attack on commercial freedom, creativity and jobs e.g. “This is not the sort of policy a government would want to impose on struggling media companies in the middle of a major global economic recession”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Non-urgent and not government’s preferred policy e.g. “While the government is supportive of limiting the exposure of children to advertising that may unduly influence them, the government will not consider regulatory action at this time”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Total unsupportive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEUTRAL FRAMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• New ideas e.g. “Junk food and alcohol advertisements should be hit with a levy to force companies to market less harmful products”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Neutral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| TOTAL | 814 | 100.0 | 508 | 100.0 | 704 | 100.0 |
Table 6.3: News actor support for advertising restrictions – statements N=1,322

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supportive news frames</th>
<th>Public Health</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Vox populi</th>
<th>Drinks Industry</th>
<th>Advertising</th>
<th>Reporter</th>
<th>NGO or CBO</th>
<th>Sport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A sensible public health response</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essential to protect the young</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combat disingenuous industries</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essential control on pervasive branding</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Especially necessary in sport</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Unnecessary for a responsible industry                      | 1             | 0.3        | 5          | 2.2             | 8           | 4.8      | 92         | 93.9  |
| An attack on legitimate commercial activity                 | -             | -          | -          | -               | 2           | 2.0      | 50         | 51.0  |
| Ineffective and ‘nannyist’                                 | 2             | 0.5        | 7          | 3.1             | 42          | 25.3     | -          | -     |
| Seen as unnecessary by the government                       | 1             | 0.3        | 36         | 16.1            | 1           | 0.6      | -          | -     |

| NEUTRAL FRAMING                                            | 19            | 5.0        | 15         | 6.7             | 2           | 1.2      | 1          | 1.0   |

| TOTAL                                                      | 383           | 100        | 224        | 100             | 166         | 100      | 98         | 100   |
DISCUSSION

In contrast to Australia’s comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising that has been incrementally implemented since September 1976, in 2012 there are effectively no legislative controls on alcohol advertising beyond industry voluntary agreements. Unlike several of the Taskforce’s key recommendations on tobacco control which the government implemented [341], those on restricting alcohol promotions with legislation have been rejected in favour of continued monitoring, with annual reporting back to the Minister [340]. The task for alcohol control advocates therefore remains imposing if the goal is to legislate necessary restrictions on alcohol advertising.

Media advocacy for legislation on advertising restrictions will be essential in building public and political support for legislative change and will inevitably meet with protracted opposition [171]. Our study provides the first analysis of reportage of such advocacy and reaction to it, in a context where some of the clearest and strongest recommendations have been publicly stated regarding alcohol advertising. Our primary finding is that this issue currently has low newsworthiness as a standalone issue. We found minimal coverage of proposals to restrict alcohol advertising on five Sydney free-to-air television channels over 24 months, and only 329 newspaper mentions in 13 leading newspapers. Of these, about two thirds situated advertising restrictions within a broad context, where restrictions alone were not the sole focus of reportage or the top priority.
where many alcohol control policies were discussed. Thus, while it is a major policy concern for public health professionals in the alcohol sector, it cannot yet be said to be a major news focus in Australia.

We had hypothesised that examining coverage before and after the release of the NPHT’s policy recommendations for alcohol would demonstrate greater debate concerning restrictions on alcohol advertising. Yet in the 12 months after the report, we did not see any increased reporting about alcohol advertising after the release of the policy and thus, unlikely to impact on the public’s awareness of the issue. In the absence of news-production studies, we cannot be certain why it did not attract greater news coverage, but suspect that a focus on other recommendations from the report, in combination with the government’s failure to support change may have contributed. This may have seen policy reform advocates loathe to be publicly critical of a government they hoped may act later, judging that little would be gained by such criticism. Perhaps reflecting this, we found very few news reports where alcohol control advocates were openly critical of government, a sentiment that was expressed more often by members of the public.

Our second main finding is that there is a general lack of specificity in the coverage about what alcohol advertising encompasses and exactly what policy reform advocates would like to see changed in the future. While alcohol experts
and advocates may be clear on these distinctions and priorities, the detailed
nuances are yet to be reflected clearly in newspaper coverage that discusses the
issue. Advertising was mostly referred to in general terms, as if it were a single
entity. Few distinctions were made evident between the large range of
traditional advertising media and the more non-traditional promotional activities
engaged in by the alcohol industry (e.g. social media pages, festival sponsorships,
merchandise giveaways etc.). The few times it was specified, alcohol advertising
was largely characterised as ‘on television’ and ‘of concern for children’, which
fails to consider the wider opportunities for exposure to alcohol advertising. For
example, there was little acknowledgment of the internet with its social
networks. Current research shows that alcohol branding activity on major social
networks which include interactive games and suggestions to drink [190], while
some young users of social networks present alcohol as a major component of
their identity, which correlates to problematic consumption [342]. Neither the
NPHT recommendations, nor the newspaper coverage reported here showed any
great focus on the issue, an important omission when online marketing
opportunities and viral marketing are likely prove significant barriers to reducing
people’s exposure to advertising [190]. Future advocacy might expand the
discussion of the different avenues used for alcohol promotion, usefully
highlighting the limitations of television curfews when underage audience
members are likely to be exposed elsewhere, regardless.
While the present low level of news coverage mostly features voices supportive of advertising restrictions, the lack of specificity in these reports suggests that advocacy experts have not always expressed the same vision, or been reported by journalists as in agreement. We found no consistent articulation of precisely what changes advocates sought: some prioritised government legislation concerning content of advertisements, while others prioritised timing and placements of advertisements and so on. There was some agreement that children and young people were a high priority, yet news reports were not clear that the sector was in agreement over where to start.

Indeed, though the NPHT report makes clear recommendations about focusing initial reform on underage audiences and advertising in sport, together these news frames only accounted for only 32% of all statements made by public health representatives. While universal agreement among health experts is not a pre-requisite, we suggest this is a clear opportunity for future advocacy regarding agreed policy recommendations.

As with previous studies [220, 232], the majority of news reports featured commentary from public health experts. Coalitions of these voices that provide comment on policy reform [67, 110], have focused on alcohol marketing. While the volume of news coverage on alcohol promotion restrictions has been modest, advocates might take some encouragement from the majority of
statements being supportive of restrictions. The dominant way of reporting is to frame it supportively, with recognition of the underlying health imperatives clear in the coverage. Should the issue gain greater levels of political traction though, those opposing restrictions could be expected to increase their profile, and to focus on specific proposals, as well as locating their critiques within general negative framings about the economy and the “nanny state” as was the case with tobacco control and the ‘alcopops’ tax [232], and demonstrated in this paper. In the second year of coverage in our data, we noted a greater proportion of negative statements made by those in the advertising industry, as well as drinks industry representatives continually emphasising they were already responsible. Future policy advocacy should thus anticipate further vocal, public opposition to the policy from this sector and consider how they would respond to the arguments documented here that job security and commercial freedoms are threatened by such restrictions. Monitoring, critically evaluating, and planning strategic responses to such opposition will be of critical importance if any advances are to be made; this occurred with advocacy for tobacco advertising controls and was crucial to ensuring their successful introduction over time. We acknowledge that tobacco control sought to ban all tobacco advertising, which is not recommended for alcohol and our results likely reflect the complexity in responding to alcohol advertising that covers a broad range of mediums and different audiences.
We suggest that given this complexity, and the present lack of governmental support for legislative changes, future advocacy could further emphasise the failure of existing structures to regulate alcohol advertisements. The systems of alcohol advertising self-regulation through voluntary codes of ethics that today substitute for legislative controls received barely any news coverage. While public health professionals are aware of the Alcoholic Beverage Advertising Codes and their inadequacies [196, 334], the issue has not yet become newsworthy, even with strong recommendations in the NPHT report. Currently, newspaper readers are likely to be unaware a self-regulatory code even exists, or that complaints about alcohol advertising can be made on this basis. Perhaps recognising this, some public health agencies have recently formed the Alcohol Advertising Review Board (AARB) [343], an alternative mechanism to consider and publicise complaints about alcohol advertising. This may prove to be a vehicle that will enable the shortcomings of self-regulation to receive publicity and lead to the inevitable “what needs to be done?” news narrative that forces consideration of change. Our suggestion for future advocacy is ongoing promotion of the awareness of the codes, how to make complaints, the need to make complaints and the two boards (ASB and AARB) that provide avenues of complaint. While we acknowledge this process functions in a space where exposure to alcohol advertising has already occurred, it nevertheless represents opportunity for advocacy in the absence of legislated changes to self-regulation.
Lastly, we found that where members of the public were reported in the coverage, they were largely supportive of alcohol advertising restrictions. This was especially true with regard to sport-related promotions, echoed by other research [344]. Future advocacy efforts might benefit from careful consideration of how to capitalise on existing sentiment, should alcohol advertising restrictions gain greater traction both politically and publicly in news reporting.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we see that while current news coverage of alcohol advertising restrictions is largely positive and recognises health benefits behind such a policy, there is still a need to further promote the policy to increase its newsworthiness and interest to both the public and policy makers. Advocates might consider defining more precisely the kinds of restrictions they would like to see prioritised, speaking mostly about those priorities in the news and address other forms of advertising beyond televised sport that still have the potential to be seen by underage children. Given existing opportunities for public health professionals to comment in the news, advocates should anticipate further vocal opposition from interest groups and prepare their response accordingly. Future research should focus on how news media messages about alcohol policies are received by audience members.
Competing interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

Authors’ contributions

ASF conceived of the study, participated in its design, coded all data, performed statistical analysis and drafted the manuscript.

SC participated in the design of the study, oversaw data coding and analysis and helped draft the manuscript.

Author information

All authors are members of the Australian Health News Research Collaboration and invite collaboration with any health researchers interested in news media reporting of health problems. For details see here:


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We would like to acknowledge Simon Holding’s assistance with inter-rater reliability coding exercises.
CHAPTER 7: WHAT SHOULD BE DONE ABOUT POLICY ON ALCOHOL PRICING AND PROMOTIONS? AUSTRALIAN EXPERTS’ VIEWS OF POLICY PRIORITIES: A QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW STUDY

PUBLISHED WORK

The data presented in this chapter were published as follows:


KEY WORDS: alcohol advertising, alcohol pricing, policy, public health, advocacy
ABSTRACT

Background: Alcohol policy priorities in Australia have been set by the National Preventative Health Task Force, yet significant reform has not occurred. News media coverage of these priorities has not reported public health experts as in agreement and Government has not acted upon the legislative recommendations made. We investigate policy experts’ views on alcohol policy priorities with a view to establishing levels of accord and providing suggestions for future advocates.

Methods: We conducted semi-structured in depth interviews with alcohol policy experts and advocates around Australia. Open-ended questions examined participants’ thoughts on existing policy recommendations, obvious policy priorities and specifically, the future of national reforms to price and promotions policies. All transcripts were analysed for major themes and points of agreement or disagreement.

Results: Twenty one alcohol policy experts agreed that pricing policies are a top national priority and most agreed that ‘something should be done’ about alcohol advertising. Volumetric taxation and minimum pricing were regarded as the most important price policies, yet differences emerged in defining the exact form of a proposed volumetric tax. Important differences in perspective emerged regarding alcohol promotions, with lack of agreement about the preferred form regulations should take, where to start and who the policy should be directed at. Very few discussed online advertising and social networks.
Conclusions: Despite existing policy collaborations, a clear ‘cut through’ message is yet to be endorsed by all alcohol control advocates. There is a need to articulate and promote in greater detail the specifics of policy reforms to minimum pricing, volumetric taxation and restrictions on alcohol advertising, particularly regarding sporting sponsorships and new media.
INTRODUCTION

Alcohol consumption is recognised as a leading cause of preventable illness and a major social burden [20, 37]. Risky consumption of alcohol causes hospitalisation from injury [29, 30], liver, brain, and other disease [19], emergency department presentations for assault [27], and high costs for alcohol associated incidents attended by law enforcement representatives [17]. Around a third of adult Australians drink alcohol at levels that put them at risk of harm from a single drinking occasion at least once per month [5]. Of concern for the community, one in five young people report drinking at very high risk levels at least once a month, with increasing trends in hospitalisations and assault [9, 11]. Taken together, alcohol consumption carries significant public and private costs [13, 16, 44].

In September 2009 the Australian government released recommendations made by the Alcohol Working Group of the National Preventative Health Taskforce, aimed at reducing consumption of alcohol in Australia and its attendant risks to health [39]. The report chronicled policy approaches consistent with international policy recommendations [36, 38] and supported by a range of Australian health and medical organisations [67, 108, 110, 345, 346]. The recommendations focused on (i) regulating the availability of alcohol, (ii) taxation and pricing measures, (iii) drink-driving counter measures, (iv) provision of treatment services, (v) altering drinking contexts to reduce harm, (vi) regulating
advertising and promotion of alcohol, and (vii) education and persuasion strategies [39]. The introduction of such preventive health policies would provide cost-effective savings to the health sector and beyond by reducing the need for treatments for alcohol related injury and disease and reducing costs associated with law enforcement [44, 47, 48].

Unlike policies affected by differences in state-based regulations, two of these interventions had the potential to be nationally implemented by Australia’s federal Government. Namely, regulating alcohol’s price through taxation and restricting alcohol advertising and promotional activities. Pricing policies that address consumption of alcohol consist of manipulations to taxes applied to alcohol and setting minimum prices below which alcohol cannot be sold, and are supported cost-effective approaches to reducing consumption [44]. Up to date evidence and economic modelling has shown that an increase in the price of alcohol is associated with reductions in both population level consumption and overall health-care costs; effects which could be maintained by a minimum price policy in a subgroup of harmful drinkers [92]. Recently a resolution on minimum pricing was adopted by the World Medical Association adding to global agreement on policies to address alcohol’s price [347]. Another meta-analysis concluded that the effects of tax and pricing policies on reducing consumption of alcohol are larger than those achieved through other prevention policies [95]. Similarly, doubling alcohol taxes is estimated to have a considerable impact on a
range of health outcomes, resulting in declines in mortality, morbidity, accidents, crime and violence [96]. Despite agreement on pricing policies among public health organisations, sections of the drinks industry in Australia have objected to the introduction of volumetric taxation and minimum pricing measures [348].

In 2008, the Australian government commissioned a review of the country’s taxation system, known as the Henry Tax Review [103]. Recommendation 71 of the review states that “all alcoholic beverages should be taxed on a volumetric basis, which, over time, should converge to a single rate, with a low-alcohol threshold introduced for all products” [104]. Beverages would thus be taxed according to the percentage of alcohol instead of the current system which applies taxes based on categories. Beer and spirits are covered by several different rates, while wine is subject to the Wine Equalisation Tax (WET), where tax is applied based on value at 29 per cent of the wholesale price, resulting in low taxes on cheap wines that can have more alcohol by volume than beer [349]. Economic modelling replacing the WET with volumetric taxation, or a tax applied at similar rates to beer, found that cheap wine would become more expensive, leading to a drop in alcohol consumption [350]. Some concerns about a volumetric tax have arisen in Australia, because consumption of beer and wine would be predicted to reduce, but consumption of spirits could increase, warranting further investigation of whether consumption patterns of particular drinks are more associated with risks to health than others [351]. Recognising
this issue, some question whether a volumetric tax should be a flat, single rate as suggested by Henry, or whether there should be graded bands within the tax, with progressively higher rates of tax within each step. This, or abolition of the WET is the preferred solution for some alcohol advocates to account for the possibility that spirits might be made cheaper by a flat tax [349].

Policy proposals that would restrict or regulate alcohol advertising take the form of bans or partial bans on all alcohol advertising, restrictions on the content of alcohol advertisements, and regulating their frequency and placement. Such proposals are also considered cost-effective tools in reducing alcohol consumption [44]. Alcohol advertisements in Australia are subject to voluntary codes, including the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) Advertiser Code of Ethics [328], the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice (CTICP) [329] and an industry voluntary agreement that regulates timing and content of some advertisements, named the Alcoholic Beverage Advertising Code[327]. Evidence supporting policy proposals to regulate alcohol advertising is not as firmly established as for some other proposed measures, in part due to the improbability that controlled trials banning or reducing exposure to advertising could ever be undertaken. Nevertheless, there is good evidence for associations between alcohol advertising and increased consumption. A systematic review of longitudinal studies found that among young people, alcohol advertising is related to increased consumption and commencement of
drinking in non-drinkers [324]. There is also evidence that voluntary codes of practice regarding alcohol advertisements are not effective, with various failures of self-regulation seeing ongoing exposure to advertising by minors [313, 321, 325, 333, 334].

In the wake of the federal government’s 2008 introduction of the ‘alcopops tax’ on ready-to-drink (RTD) pre-mixed spirits [272], their stated commitments to improving population health through the use of prevention strategies [340], a request for a discussion paper on minimum pricing from the Australian National Preventive Health Agency [352] and the Henry Review of taxation [104], the policy atmosphere seemed promising for alcohol control advocacy in Australia toward the end of the first decade of the new millennium. Collaborations of Australian health researchers and organisations voiced considerable support for the policy recommendations made in the NPHT report [39] as well as concern about the involvement of drinks industry groups in setting government policy related to alcohol, when the industry had previously opposed introduction of other potentially important policies [353]. However, the government rejected the volumetric tax proposal, citing a wine glut and possible industry restructuring [340]. Likewise, the government opted to only note recommendations regarding setting a minimum price for alcohol and restricting alcohol advertising through legislation, without committing to introduce the proposals [340].
Given these recent government responses, alcohol control policy advocates face challenges in arguing their case for reforms in these two core areas of policy, which are found to be highly contested public discussions [232, 354]. This paper examines the views of key alcohol experts and advocates in Australia regarding priorities for the future of alcohol control in two policy areas: restrictions on alcohol advertising and regulating price via taxation and minimum pricing. We hypothesised that there would be strong consensus among experts over alcohol taxation, but that less coherence would be evident over alcohol advertising restrictions.

**METHOD**

Potential informants were identified from members of the alcohol working group of the National Preventative Health Taskforce; policy advocates or researchers who repeatedly appeared in the Australian Health News Research Collaboration’s database [155] commenting on alcohol stories; and researchers who had recently published on alcohol policy. In addition, we identified policy specialists from websites for the Australian Drug Foundation [355], the National Drug Research Institute [71], the McCusker Centre for Action on Alcohol and Youth [76], the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre [356], and the Foundation for Alcohol Research & Education [73]. Further recommendations were taken from participants as they were recruited.
Data collection

We used semi-structured interviews conducted in person or via telephone using Skype when this was not possible. Interviews took between 45-60 minutes and audio was recorded and transcribed. Interviews involved open-ended questions about Australian alcohol policy priorities and detailed questions about two policy areas: taxation and restrictions on alcohol advertising.

The study protocol was approved by the University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (protocol #12034). All informants were given Participant Information Sheets, an opportunity to ask questions and signed Informed Consent forms prior to interview.

Data Analysis

Transcripts were analysed using NVIVO [357] to identify major themes related to informants’ views on policy priorities for alcohol in Australia. We approached the transcripts using concept-driven coding, where we created a coding scheme which followed topics outlined by the interview schedule, derived from best practice in prevention and also data-driven coding [358] where we allowed topics to emerge from reading the data, and these were added to the coding framework. Codes were trialled on three transcripts then used across all data. Our focus in this paper is primarily on points of agreement and disagreement
between informants on tax and pricing policies and restrictions on alcohol advertising.

RESULTS

Twenty six subjects were invited to be interviewed and 21 (81%) participated. Respondents were university research academics (n=14) or employed by non-governmental and community-based organisations (n=7).

General policy priorities

Participants were keen to emphasise the limited impact of pursuing any one area of policy change but of the need to pursue a range of options. “You can’t just play with one piece of this puzzle; you have to play with all the pieces together if you’re really serious about changing culture” (E13). The impact of any one policy was likely to be small and justified the need for a mix. “They’re all going to have effects that are... not huge effects. So there’s no single one of them that will solve the problem...” (E11). Within that range of options, all agreed there were two to three policy areas which were critical to addressing problematic consumption of alcohol. “The top three we push from a policy point of view are price, availability and marketing” (E13). This sentiment was echoed by nearly all informants regarding price and availability, with some differences regarding the need to regulate alcohol advertising.
When trying to decide priorities for action, informants were influenced by different factors. Some emphasised the real-world constraints on policy making and the need to respond to changes in the policy environment that affected the likelihood of a specific policy being implemented. “I haven’t bothered much to prioritise the strategies because policy making doesn’t happen in that way. You’ve got to be opportunistic. If something comes up...you’ve really got to jump on board and push” (E2). An example of setting priorities based on the current political climate was raised by one informant: “There is a tax forum... That should be our sector’s priority. We should be focussing on what the government is actually focusing on and not running off to lobby for changes to advertising regime” (E17). In contrast, other informants might arrive at the same policy priority, but for different reasons. For example, evidence of effectiveness was often invoked as an imperative for action: “There’s good evidence that pricing taxation is a very clear, logical way to go” (E18). Equally, lack of evidence of effectiveness was sometimes invoked as a caution, as in the case of advertising restrictions: “I think we harm our good standing in the community if we start advocating things which we are advocating on the basis of instincts rather than evidence” (E9). Another expert, speaking about the role of evidence in setting policy priorities said “I want to be in a position where I’m telling the truth, even if it’s inconvenient”(E11) and emphasised that evidence should speak for itself, not be edited to fit within a policy argument.
Policies to regulate the price of alcohol

All informants agreed that policies regulating the price of alcohol were of great importance and clearly supported by the international evidence base: “it's been shown by the research around the world that it's the cheapest and easiest way to affect population level consumption. It's a blunt instrument, it has to be conceded, but if you’re ranking things on a one, two, three star it gets three stars” (E17). Though price policies were viewed as having the most impact, informants still stressed the need for a range of policies: “Taxation is the most cost effective but taxation doesn't work in isolation” (E3). They also cautioned that while there was good evidence to introduce pricing policies, they did not always work exactly as predicted: “So they're a tool. They're one of the more powerful tools but... the world is more complicated than simply saying you pull this lever and that happens” (E11). Despite these cautions, informants argued that policies aimed at alcohol’s price were necessitated by (i) the harm created by cheap alcohol: “I mean all those in the hospital, every week we've got people coming in drinking a couple of casks of wine a day. It's so cheap...” (E18) and (ii) irregularities in the current taxation system, such as the wine equalisation tax [359], “If we can fix that up then we've gone a long way to addressing those inequities of the system” (E3).
**Volumetric taxation**

Given these clear imperatives, informants regularly referred to two approaches to alcohol's price that were most important for advocacy: “...we need to get the volumetric and get it tiered so that there’s higher premium on higher alcohol products. Secondly, bring in a minimum price so we stop these two buck chucks being sold” (E13).

Volumetric taxation was uniformly seen as a solution: “...it's consistency in taxation. So if people prefer to consume alcoholic beverages that have a high content they’ll pay a higher price for it. If they prefer to drink low alcohol beverages it’ll be cheaper. The industry will be guided by people’s preferences” (E3). It was also seen as a way to stop the drinks industry from exploiting loopholes that existed in the current taxation system: “The industry's very clever...They diversify their products to suit and they’ll target beverages that have a lower tax base to increase their profits” (E3).

Some raised the idea that while a volumetric tax was essential, there should also be an option to apply higher taxes on particular drinks associated with greater harm in specific drinking contexts: “...some sort of flexibility for a sort of harm tax as well. What I mean by that is to quickly identify any products that are particularly risky. For example if we’re finding that ready to drink alcohol is very sweet and attractive to young women... it actually is appropriate to... [apply] for
want of a better term, a harm levy or a health dividend....” (E5). Informants who raised this possibility did acknowledge some difficulties associated with the concept: “...Is the trouble per litre different for different beverages? ... It’s really up in the air at this point. You can point to a couple of things around the edge where spirits really matters. One of them is obviously dying of an overdose. You really have to try hard to die of an overdose of beer” (E11). Some highlighted the lack of evidence about specific drinks and the inability of existing data collection to answer such questions: “So without that evidence it’s very difficult to ascertain a relationship between what you drink and the particular harm associated with that” (E3).

Nevertheless, one pointed to an agreement made between a collaboration of advocates that sought to reconcile taxes applied based on percentage alcohol with concerns this could make some spirits cheaper and increase harm: “we agreed on a position which was sort of bands with higher tax per unit for a stronger beverage in about four or five bands” (E11). This meant the tax applied would not be flatly tied to percentage alcohol by volume, but would be tiered in a number of tax bands that were progressively higher [349].
Minimum Pricing

Some thought that the current political environment was unfavourable for volumetric taxation given that the Government was already under fire for introducing other ‘big taxes’ in other sectors other than health: “… it would be portrayed as another great big new tax. I’m sure the Government’s not going to touch it for that reason” (E16). Given this concern, many proffered the idea of a setting a minimum ‘floor’ price. They reasoned that if a volumetric tax was politically untenable, then a minimum price would at least remove extraordinarily cheap alcohol from the market: “… a minimum price as well to disallow grotesque promotions of cheap alcohol. So, you know, you buy a bottle of wine for $1.99 cheaper than you can buy a bottle of water” (E5) and these informants saw minimum price as “an alternative way of accomplishing much the same thing from a public health point of view” (E16).

Policies to regulate alcohol advertising

The role of evidence

All participants agreed that the nature and extent of alcohol advertising represented a clear challenge for policy reform: “I think advertising matters. It matters in this long, public debate – an ongoing public debate about what’s the place of alcohol in the culture.” (E11).
However, beyond this basic level of agreement, there was some discordance over where to start and how the case for controls should be argued. In particular, there appeared to be disagreement regarding the evidence base for alcohol advertising’s impact on consumption. Some argued that “Fundamentally the aggregate level data ... it’s very difficult to show any effect of a change in advertising regulations on consumption...” (E11) while others had a different view: “I reckon it’s pretty clear-cut because we don’t want kids to be exposed to that stuff and the research is clear that it increases consumption” (E13). Some acknowledged that to date the evidence base had not been clear cut, but was now becoming clearer, especially in relation to young people: “I mean, there’s increasing evidence in the literature about the impact of advertising on young people. Branding, early uptake, familiarisation, you know, the use of Bundy Bears and kid friendly fuzzy looking creatures that kids warm to, all of this is an issue” (E6). Some emphasised that evidence was difficult to collect in environments where branding and promotional activities were so pervasive “the evidence for it as an etiological factor is not as strong as it is for the physical and economic availability just because of the nature of the intervention, the nature of the exposure. It’s pervasive; it’s hard to determine the effects of an increment in exposure to advertising, promotion and sponsorship.” (E2). Some felt the claim that there was no evidence was naive because comprehensive bans had “never been tried” (E4). Some suggested other strategies to address difficulties with the evidence base: “These guys are selling a product which is a drug, which has an
impact. I think the onus of proof should actually be more on them” (E5) and asserted that the call to produce more evidence was disingenuous because “advertisers do these things because they work” (E17).

Risk groups

Experts mostly agreed that children and young people were the risk groups most susceptible to alcohol advertisements. There was consensus that policy advocacy on advertising controls should refer to those underage. Even where difficulties in reducing exposure were acknowledged, sentiment was strong: “I think we need to ban any advertising to which kids are exposed and you look first and foremost at the high exposure areas for kids. So you’re talking television, you’re talking radio...You’re talking very difficult ... but you’re talking internet” (E4).

Some extended the focus to advertising targeting older high risk groups: “I think we know the young males who are high risk group, and the young males are the ones who are most likely to watch sport and be influenced by sporting heroes” (E18).

What kind of restrictions?

Respondents discussed a range of options to consider. There was no clear consensus on what the first steps should be, or the form that advertising regulations should take if policy reform opportunities arose. Some favoured
legislation of existing ABAC guidelines, with an independent body to oversee restrictions: “...the objective here is to get the industry's code, which is by and large not a bad code - it's just that nobody observes it - to get that converted into a statutory form, legislated and to get rid of some of the exemptions that the industry provides for itself” (E17). Others thought that advertising content was almost irrelevant and it was more important to regulate where and how often alcohol advertising could appear: “I think there's potentially a persuasive public case to reduce advertising and to move it from certain locations or certain associations.” (E19). Still others thought this missed the point: “Look I think it's a good idea. But while we've got sponsorship of sporting heroes, that totally unravels it, because you've associated it with fit, muscly young guys. So it's undercover doing exactly the same” (E18).

Again, these differences were related to whether they approached problems pragmatically, with an eye to the current political climate, or whether they centred on the evidence base as their guide: “My reading of the evidence is that restrictions on what is in the ad are almost useless. That it’s the amount of advertising that matters, if anything matters” (E11). Other respondents were influenced by personal circumstances, such as their experiences with children: “As a parent I struggle with the fact that I don't have the freedom to sit down and watch cricket... and have my kids watch it and for them - I don't have the choice
as to whether they're going to be exposed to alcohol advertising or not. That really bothers me.” (E2).

These differences were common and an awareness of them within the alcohol control field was acknowledged by most respondents throughout their interviews. In acknowledging these differences, they also recognised many difficulties associated with introducing regulations, particularly with regard to sporting promotional activities. Many agreed that exposure to alcohol advertising through professional sport was a problem to be addressed and concern was particularly concentrated on television advertisements: “I think the first transgression is the code essentially says, no advertising of alcohol products before 8.30pm, except if it's sport. Well on the weekends it’s wall to wall sport.” (E17).

Despite agreement among experts that ‘something should be done’ many identified challenges to implementing any meaningful change in this arena, especially if all sporting groups in Australia were considered. Some were concerned about the practicalities of how to phase out sponsorship: “…probably it's necessary to phase it out over a number of years and give the sports the chance to find other sources of revenue.” (E2). Some were more concerned about defining exactly what ‘sponsorship’ meant, particularly for non-professional teams. For example, “you can certainly fuss around with what they’re allowed to
do and not allowed to do. Are they allowed to have a cap that says VB on it?” (E11). Such concerns gave way to the effect this might have on sporting teams in smaller towns: “... in some places that's all the support that the local sports club gets. Sometimes there's no other sponsor big enough in the town.” (E16). When prompted to talk about the potential for government buyouts of existing sponsorships, other problems were highlighted: “I think the problem we’ve got is we don’t understand how much money is required...it’s the value to the TV stations and the value then to the media rights, so you’re not talking small quantities of money” (E13). Ethical issues were also raised: “if you’re doing that at the club level, you’re actually rewarding the sports clubs that have taken on an alcohol sponsorship and you’re giving nothing to the clubs that have battled on without one.” (E13).

The Alcoholic Beverages Advertising Code

All respondents were unanimous in their assessment that the current system of voluntary, self-regulated, industry codes of practices were not functioning as they should. The ABAC guidelines and their implementation were variously called a “joke” (E2), “rubbish” and a “sham” (E6), a “stunt for industry” (E13), “protection devices for the industries... no teeth at all” (E11) and “so weak that you can’t do anything with them...” (E4). This sentiment was expressed often, alongside dismay that the government did not move to address the issues: “They’ve had two government inquiries into that, both inquiries have said it
doesn’t work and both governments of different persuasions have said we’re going to keep it going. What the hell is going on?” (E13). Others pointed out that the current system relies on members of the public making a complaint, which means exposure to alcohol promotion is not reduced until adjudication has been made.

New media

Some mentioned forms of new media that current guidelines did not cover:

“...you have to pay attention to the whole range, including what they call below the line stuff, the stuff that is viral advertising on the web and so forth” (E11). They emphasised the role of technology: “it’s now not just about a few adverts on television. It’s about the viral stuff, the iPhone applications, the stuff on the internet that is just passing by a lot of people” (E5) and they positioned social media networks as places where underage people were exposed to unrestrained and engaging alcohol advertising: “the internet's totally unregulated, and there are very effective advertisements on the internet. All the 16 year olds are all logging onto Facebook pages for the Goon Bags, and The Big Beer Ad which was so good that I watched it several times” (E18).

DISCUSSION

Our study considered accord among Australian alcohol policy researchers and advocates about two core alcohol control policy options. Our findings offer
insights from experts that may assist future advocates to join the public conversation and for all advocates to present a united front, arguing the case for evidence based pragmatic solutions for alcohol related problems.

All informants readily agreed that price is a key focal area for reducing alcohol problems. However, the consensus among those interviewed about the regulation of alcohol advertising and promotion was comparatively ‘general’: when prompted to discuss explicit restrictions on advertising, differences emerged. While there was broad consensus that ‘something needs to be done’ about controlling alcohol promotions, there was little consensus on exactly what should occur and with what priority. This is echoed in public discussions, where news-coverage of alcohol advertising controls shows similar divergence of opinion concerning what kind of advertising is the focus and what form regulation should take [354]. While the National Alliance for Action on Alcohol (NAAA) now has a clear position statement on advertising reform [107], the organisation was in its early stages at the time of interview and these suggestions had yet to result in a clear ‘cut through’ message that advocates repeatedly endorse in public statements or the private discussions reported here. The field would thus benefit from wider sectoral agreement on a policy platform on advertising controls, specifying and arguing for an explicit set of reforms, with the NAAA being well placed to support such activity
The high degree of unity within the alcohol control field regarding the importance of a volumetric tax is notable. While informants expressed dismay that the current political climate was unsupportive of this measure, the consensus causes consistent messages to be voiced on this issue. That said, there was some lack of agreement over whether the tax should follow a flat rate based purely on volume of alcohol, or whether there should be allowances made for higher taxing in higher bands tied to volume. Thus, advocacy efforts focussed on existing policy platforms articulated by the NPHT and the NAAA regarding the likely form a banded-volumetric tax would take may provide important reference points to ‘sign on’ all organisations which support reform [346]. While the introduction of a volumetric tax is not imminent, the consensus about reform on this issue among researchers and advocates is unlikely to see it disappear as a repeated core demand when alcohol advocates repeatedly provide public news commentary on ‘solutions’ to alcohol problems in the community.

The rate of progress of policy reform in other fields provides encouragement for ongoing long-term advocacy despite the political conditions. For example, plain tobacco packaging legislation has been recently introduced after first being proposed in 1986 [360]. Clearly, advocacy for volumetric taxation will require a long-term commitment to continuing advocacy, while producing the evidence necessary to arguing the case.
Our findings also suggest a clear opportunity for a united vision regarding minimum or floor pricing of alcohol to emerge in the public debate. Some informants pointed out that public health improvements to be gained from such a policy are clear and evidence based [97, 101]. Given the current assessment that a volumetric tax is unlikely, minimum pricing proposals potentially represent an alternative strategy for those advocates who support pragmatic solutions which may have a greater chance of being adopted in a given political climate. Minimum pricing for alcohol has been trialled in the Northern Territory and is the focus of a current issues paper for the Australian National Preventive Health Agency [106]. However, minimum pricing is contested by sectors of the drinks industry, who contend that a minimum price would adversely affect moderate drinkers and low-income households while having limited impact on heavy drinkers [348]. There are also questions about whether minimum price policy would be considered ‘anti-competitive’ and breach existing trade agreements. This was found not to be the case in the UK and is seen as viable in Australia [361]. Clarification of these points represents a substantial opportunity for united advocacy in the future.

At present, the government has rejected outright proposals to introduce a volumetric tax yet has opted for ‘continued monitoring’ of alcohol advertising. While this is far from ideal for those urging the introduction of legislated controls on advertising, the possibility of such measures being introduced in a
subsequent, more favourable political climate remains. Focusing on greater specification about the message concerning alcohol advertising may be a key strategic move for Australian advocates.

Previously, this issue received scant and poorly focussed news coverage [354]. The NPHT report recommended that an initial focus on restricting alcohol advertising should attend specifically to underage exposure and promotions associated with sport. Our interviews did not show consensus on the same focus, with differences of opinion about priority risk groups, whether it was the timing, frequency or content of advertising that should be addressed or on how to approach the issues of alcohol sponsorship in sports beyond a very general concern that it was a problem. Only one respondent reported an organisational focus on ending sports sponsorships in line with the NPHT recommendations. There is currently no national policy platform that appears to be supported publicly by all leading figures in the field, despite national recommendations and a clear policy position adopted by the NAAA. Securing the understanding and support of such agencies for these national policies would ensure a more clearly articulated vision about the specific controls on advertising that are needed. Informants were clear that the implementation of the ABAC guidelines was not effective in reducing underage exposure to advertising. Capitalising on this consensus will be a sensible point of reference in stimulating further, more focussed and precise policy discussion. Indeed, the Alcohol Advertising Review
Board [343] is also adjudicating complaints about alcohol advertising, providing a point of comparison to a drinks industry administered mechanism where complaints are assessed and rejected at a high rate [333, 334]. This seems likely to further highlight the problems with the current self-regulatory system. Although this alternative adjudication system has no powers to order changes in advertising, nor does the ABAC system, and it remains a useful tool to highlight the major shortcomings of the present industry self-regulation.

A key area of concern for regulation of alcohol advertising is the internet and its social media networks. While the NAAA mentions the internet in its policy priorities, the current NPHT recommendations do not address online alcohol advertising. This neglect was raised by few informants in our study. There are indications that pages with branded material on social networks like Facebook are becoming more common and recently were found by the ASB to be a form of marketing that falls under the ABAC guidelines [88]. This is an important ruling for alcohol control, and should stimulate alcohol control agencies to develop policy positions on internet promotions. There are several examples of explicit policy priorities that advocates and experts in the field of alcohol control can consider [39, 107]. However, the current differences reported here indicate that not all Australian alcohol control agencies are united on what these should be and ensuring that all members of the sector promote the same vision. Some have argued that an internationally agreed framework convention on alcohol
control is of high importance [310] in achieving clearly articulated and agreed upon policy reform steps.

Some limitations to interpreting the results of this study include the fact that not all experts identified could participate and we note there may be candidates for inclusion who were not identified by our sampling approach. While we made efforts to identify experts in public roles regarding alcohol advocacy, it is possible that further input from other experts could advance the current discussion. Likewise, other research foci were covered in the interviews that could not all be included here and restricting the focus of this paper to pricing and promotions policies may have limited the scope of these findings. We also note that after the research was conducted, new policy alliances were created that are working towards common policy goals, for example, the NSW/ACT Alcohol Policy Alliance (NAAPA) [362]. Likewise, the aforementioned National Alliance for Action and Alcohol [346] and the Alcohol Advertising Review Board [343], though formed, were still in the early stages of refining policy positions when the research was conducted. It is likely that such organisations are already assisting to move the sector forward on unified approaches to alcohol policy solutions.

Finally, our findings point to a need for further research to answers questions about the evidence base, which could be used by advocates in future policy advocacy. Namely, clearer answers are required about whether harm-taxes for
specific drinks are warranted, what impact advertising restrictions would have, whether any restrictions short of a total ban would have the desired impact, and the kind of sporting sponsorship that should be tackled first. These would help to clarify and unite positions taken by experts across the whole field.

**CONCLUSIONS**

There is a high degree of unity among alcohol experts regarding the policy priorities for alcohol control in Australia, with recognition of substantial challenges to be faced in implementing reform. While experts agree in principle with needed reforms to alcohol’s price and promotion, our findings suggest there is still room for greater agreement on the details and specific forms these policies would take in the future, particularly with regard to alcohol advertising. With these finer details resolved, potential advocates throughout the sector could confidently add their voices to experts’ voices in existing public discussions.
Competing interests

None to declare

Authors’ contributions

AF conceived of the study, designed the study protocol, collected all data, performed the analysis, and drafted and revised the manuscript.

SC supervised the study’s conception, design and data collection, and helped to draft and revise the manuscript.

All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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CHAPTER 8: “LIKE THROWING A BOWLING BALL AT A BATTLESHIP” AUDIENCE RESPONSES TO AUSTRALIAN NEWS STORIES ABOUT ALCOHOL PRICING AND PROMOTION POLICIES: A QUALITATIVE FOCUS GROUP STUDY

PUBLISHED WORK

The data presented in this chapter were published as follows:

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Policies affecting alcohol’s price and promotion are effective measures to reduce harms. Yet policies targeting populations are unpopular with the public, whose views can be influenced by news framings of policy narratives. In Australia, alcohol taxation receives high news coverage, while advertising restrictions have not until recently, and narratives are highly contested for each. However, research specifically examining how audiences respond to such news stories is scant. We sought to explore audience understanding of news reports about two alcohol policy proposals.

Method: From June to August 2012, 46 participants were recruited for 8 focus groups in age-brackets of young people aged 18-25 years, parents of young people, and adults aged 25 or older. Groups were split by education. Participants were asked their prior knowledge of alcohol policies, before watching and discussing four news stories about alcohol taxation and advertising.

Results: Participants were clear that alcohol poses problems, yet thought policy solutions were ineffective in a drinking culture they viewed as unamenable to change and unaffected by alcohol’s price or promotion. Without knowledge of its actual effect on consumption, they cited the 2008 alcopops tax as a policy failure, blaming cheaper substitution. Participants had low knowledge of advertising restrictions, yet were concerned about underage exposure. They offered conditional support for restrictions, while doubting its effectiveness.
There was marked distrust of statistics and news actors in broadcasts, yet discussions matched previous research findings.

**Conclusions:** News coverage has resulted in strong audience understanding of alcohol related problems but framed solutions have not always provided clear messages, despite audience support for policies. Future advocacy will need to continue recent moves to address the links between alcohol’s price and promotion with the drinking culture, as well as facilitate understandings of how this culture is amenable to change through the use of evidence-based policies.
INTRODUCTION

Health and social costs associated with Australian alcohol consumption [16] underscore high priority for policy responses that reduce the prevalence of community harms [44]. In 2009, the evidence for a range of policy priorities were assessed and recommendations outlined [39]. Among these, two have the potential for population-wide reach: alcohol pricing and taxation, and restrictions on alcohol advertising.

Taxation aims to affect alcohol’s price [361], with higher taxation for high alcohol drinks and preferential tax for drinks with lower concentrations of alcohol. Alcohol concentration is not uniformly taxed in Australia, with drinks taxed by beverage class (beer, wine or spirits) and subject to different rates that favour higher alcohol percentage wine [349]. In 2008, the Australian government commissioned a review of Australia’s tax system, to improve economic efficiency for future years by recommended changes to the structure of taxation and transfers [103]. Known as the Henry Tax Review, the 2010 report concluded that alcohol taxation should be re-evaluated, and recommended volumetric taxation, where the tax applied refers to the amount of alcohol in a drink, rather than beverage class [104]. This could be a flat volumetric tax [351], or public health’s preferred solution: a tiered tax with increasing tax ‘bands’ tied to increasing percentage alcohol in drinks [349]. An existing pricing policy based on beverage class, is the 2008 ‘alcopops tax’ which increased the tax applied to ready-to-drink
(RTD) spirit mixes [232]. Other potential approaches include a minimum ‘floor price’ for a standard drink, below which alcohol cannot be sold [352].

Restrictions on alcohol advertising in Australia rely upon an industry voluntary agreement, the Alcoholic Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC) [327]. In turn, the code and television advertisements are subject to the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice (CTICP) [329] and the Australian Association of National Advertisers Code of Ethics [328]. These include restrictions on the timing and placement of advertising (e.g. no television advertising before 8.30pm unless during live sports broadcasts) and on their content (e.g. not depicting underage people). However, such codes fail to prevent underage exposure [315] and existing guidelines are breached [196, 332-334]. Complaints are made to the Advertising Standard Board (ASB) [363] yet are rarely upheld, prompting the formation of the Alcohol Advertising Review Board (AARB) by public health organisations. The AARB aims to provide an independent avenue for complaint [343].

Acceptance of alcohol policies depends on community attitudes towards harms and understanding of policy solutions. A national poll found 80 per cent of all Australians think there is problem with excessive alcohol consumption. Support increased with age, and over a third perceive alcohol to be the most harmful drug [364]. Young people and their parents are highly aware of the negative
impacts of alcohol, particularly with regard to mental health [365]. However, attitudes towards policies are mixed. Older Australians, non-drinkers and those with teenagers are more likely to support tax policies than other groups [364]. The more alcohol people consume, the greater the opposition to taxation [366]. Police and the public are more supportive than licensees regarding licensed premises strategies [235]. Punishment of drunk patrons, and harsher penalties for drink-driving, are more popular than reducing alcohol’s accessibility [234]. A review found that targeted policies (e.g. penalties for irresponsible service of alcohol) are more palatable than universal policies (e.g. taxation) [233]. However, with alcohol advertising, support for greater regulation of promotions by an independent body is high [233, 364], especially regarding sport [344].

A key element influencing community perceptions is how news stories frame policy narratives. A large body of research has investigated the power of news media to shape dominant definitions of what is at issue and solutions deemed appropriate [121, 128, 136]. As Entman wrote, to frame is to “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient... in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation” (p52)[121]. This is explicitly recognised by advocates who seek to shape audience interpretations of alcohol news stories [164, 165]. News coverage of alcohol control is highly contested, where public
health and drinks industry news actors promote differing policy solutions, based on different organisational aims [87, 237, 308, 310].

In 2009, alcohol and substance use ranked eighth among health stories on Australian television news [155]. Regular attention to alcohol represents a significant opportunity for policy advocates to continue advancing key messages and for researchers to explore the dominant messages being conveyed. An analysis of all Sydney television news stories about alcohol between 2005 and 2010 [338] shows that news paints a substantial picture of the ‘problem’ of alcohol and attendant health effects, but that reportage of alcohol-control policies was scant and unaligned with identified priorities, with the notable exception of the ‘alcopops tax’ [232].

In newspapers, alcohol advertising restrictions have historically experienced low newsworthiness and are contested by a range of public health and industry voices [354]. In recent years, groups like the AARB and the National Alliance for Action on Alcohol (NAAA) [69] have made media advocacy concerning alcohol advertising a top priority [107], likely affecting the news coverage. Likewise, newspaper coverage of the alcopops tax [232] saw public health representatives stressing potential health benefits, while opponents stressed potential substitution effects and accused the government of a ‘tax grab’.
While the aforementioned national poll gives insight into the public’s support for alcohol control policies, and news content analyses reveal the narratives in play in the news, there is little research examining how these factors relate to each other in the audience. This is important for refining future key messages and advocacy efforts concerning alcohol. In this paper, we examine audience understandings of news broadcasts about alcohol taxation and advertising policies. We hypothesised (i) audiences would agree there was an alcohol ‘problem’ in Australia, (ii) attitudes towards the alcopops tax would reflect dominant arguments seen in newspaper coverage, and (iii) audiences would have limited understanding of alcohol advertising restrictions due to its past low newsworthiness and standing as a ‘proposal’.

**METHOD**

**Ethics statement**

The study protocol was approved by the University’s Human Research Ethics Committee.

**Focus groups**

We used semi-structured focus group discussions to examine audience responses. Participants were recruited via email networks, study information flyers, and ‘snowball’ referrals. Using groups identified in prior research [364], we aimed to recruit drinkers and non-drinkers in the following age brackets: 18 –
25 years; 25+ years; and parents of young people (i.e. aged under 25). It proved difficult to recruit non-drinkers. We ran mixed sex groups within these age ranges, split by level of education. Participants were compensated $A50 for their time.

**Data collection**

Between June and August 2012, eight focus groups (n=46) were facilitated by author AF and each ran for about one hour (Table 8.1).

**Table 8.1: characteristics of focus groups recruited**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>n</th>
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<th>Education</th>
<th>Individual gender and age</th>
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<td>25+</td>
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<tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>25+</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>M?, F38, M33, M32, F25</td>
</tr>
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<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
<td>F23, M24, F19, F20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Participants were given information about the study and an opportunity to ask questions before signing written consent forms. Discussion was encouraged, with assurances there were no wrong answers. Discussions were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Participants were asked about their news habits,
recollections about alcohol news stories and knowledge of policies before prompted discussions about taxation and advertising. Participants were shown four news clips concerning (i) the 2008 alcopops tax, (ii) conflicting data about the impact of the alcopops tax, (iii) proposals to restrict alcohol advertising in professional sport and, (iv) reports that broad advertising restrictions could result in lower consumption and lower morbidity. Display order was alternated, so that half discussed advertising first, while others started with the alcopops tax.

Data analysis
Transcripts were analysed using NVIVO 10. The interview schedule, a previous interview study [367] and news content analyses [232, 338, 354] were used to develop initial codes and we allowed further codes that arose within the data. Coding was trialled and refined on two transcripts, before being applied across the remainder. The two trial transcripts were then recoded at the end and included in the analysis.

RESULTS
Alcohol in the news
Participants reported active news-seeking and passive exposure to news. With the exception of the parents’ group, television news was actively rejected as low quality. Many described preferred news sources, such as individual RSS feeds.
A clear characterisation of alcohol stories arose in all groups: “That it’s bad. That it's infecting society. That it's corrupting all the youths and everyone’s going crazy” (F19). Recollections of commonly arising narratives related to youth, drunkenness and violence: “I just remember like the footage on telly of really trashy girls in the street, just like falling over each other...” (F28).

Younger participants reported an inability to identify with news portrayals of young people. They perceived that the news made unwarranted generalisations and some actively rejected news stories as a result of their own experiences: “...they keep talking about people getting beaten up on the street... but when I go out I hardly ever see it” (M23). Several parents thought the dominant focus on violence and accidents resulted in omissions of important information, such as longer term effects on health. They felt the emphasis on binge drinking allowed young people to ignore the risks posed to their health in later years.

**Understanding of alcohol policies**

Participants reported limited policy knowledge beyond state-based venue licensing and policing of alcohol related violence. Most related policies to antisocial behaviour instead of measures aimed at the wider population. While some mentioned pricing measures, only one detailed specifics: “…the government enforces a regulation whereby alcohol vendors have to charge a minimum, for certain or all, products I assume, I don’t really know...” (M24).
A common pattern emerged where, unprompted, many reported misgivings about the effectiveness of policies, as alcohol-related problems were seen as both too complex and too socially embedded for any policy to create meaningful changes. They felt that suggested policies were over-simplified and too targeted to address a problem they saw as huge and potentially intractable: “It’s like throwing a bowling ball at a battle ship…” (M33).

One person perceived confusion in public discussion about the aims and reach of specific polices and thought that this information would be useful for the public to have in order to understand the issues: “…none of them have stated what the desired end goal is. Is it a reduction in road fatalities? Is it a reduction in liver cancer? … Even the politicians who are proposing for and against them, haven’t really spelt out what it is they’re trying to achieve. They’re just giving us a vibe this would be a good idea.” (M33).

Younger participants perceived themselves as commonly the target of such measures, yet thought the problem existed more largely in society, pointing out that older people consumed alcohol and such consumption was seen as socially acceptable, not problematic. They felt that focusing on young people was hypocritical and asserted that those voicing policies also drank when they were young, so questioned what had changed.
Alcohol advertising restrictions

Participants had low knowledge regarding advertising restrictions, with little understanding of whether these were legislated, what form they might take and who was responsible for oversight. Most commonly, they reported restrictions on television advertisements only and were unsure of the curfew’s time: “I know they’re not allowed to advertise before a certain time in the day. They’re not allowed to advertise during children’s programming. I’m not sure of any other limitations…” (M32). Only one mentioned that restrictions were voluntary and expressed cynicism that they were adhered to. The same person mentioned restrictions on content of advertisements, yet acknowledged they had never known the details. Nobody mentioned the ABAC guidelines by name or the Advertising Standards Board.

Some denied advertising affected consumers while others thought effects were self-evident: “…that’s the nature of the beast isn’t it? Really, I mean if it didn’t work they wouldn’t do it” (M45). Some thought advertising effects receded with age: “I guess when you get older, maybe you tune out to the ads, it’s not important” (M45), while others thought other factors, such as parenting, could overcome advertising effects. These discussions were debated within groups, with some reconciling the differences to brand preference: “I think the
advertising is more to get people to decide what to drink rather than to start drinking or not drinking” (F24).

The news clip discussing sport advertising restrictions featured a politician and three sporting administrators, causing some to reject it out of hand: “I just roll my eyes when I hear his name now so I’m usually not looking at the screen while he’s talking” (M32). Some noted the absence of health news actors, who they felt would have lent credibility to the news broadcasts. In particular, parents thought featuring sport-CEOs obscured health issues, stating that CEOs had mostly economic concerns and did not care about a health angle. Parents were concerned about the impact these sorts of actions had on people’s lives in the community: “There’s a self-interest, at the cost of maybe community values and how it’s going to impact everyman’s life…” (F41) More than other groups, parents saw mutually vested interests in relationships between sporting and alcohol companies: “…the organisers want the advertising because of the money but the advertisers must want to advertise, otherwise if it didn't work for them they wouldn’t do it...” (F51). This concept of was echoed occasionally in other groups, where some thought CEO news actors were interested in preserving salary bonuses and questioned why sport was allowed to have alcohol advertising, when the 830 pm curfew acknowledges that a problem exists.
However, some could not see advertising restrictions being effective: “I think that they’re going to drink beer watching sport regardless if there are ads or not. So I don’t see why it would make a difference” (F18). Younger participants were more likely to view alcohol advertising in sport as unproblematic.

Despite conflict about the effectiveness of restrictions, participants were united regarding advertising to children: “I’m a bit torn because I do really like sport. I am aware that a lot of high level sport does survive on corporate partnerships. But I’m really feeling that I don’t see why it has to be alcohol and I do think that a lot of young kids [are] watching live sport…” (M33). Two participants consistently objected to this though: “I mean yes we should be protecting kids...but it’s adult drinking that’s a problem. You’re thinking of these kids when they grow up and start drinking, so what about the adults?” (F23).

All participants expressed some conditional support for advertising restrictions, with most arguing the code of practice should be followed by advertisers, monitored by the government and have stronger punishments for breaches. Parents gave unqualified support, more than in other groups, with their children in mind: “Having kids I know that they watch the TV. They’re very impressionable.” (F?).
The ‘alcopops’ tax

Participants reported hazy recollections of the 2008 tax: “I do remember hearing it. Pretty much all I remember is they wanted to bring up the price of the alcohol sort of more appealing to the younger people...in some sort of effort to curb the amount they’re going to drink, which is never going to happen” (M32). Some were clear that it was failed exercise: “The tax thing that didn’t work” (F19), while others were less sure: “We don’t know if it worked. We have got no idea” (M34).

None related personally to the tax, describing it as something happening to other people, citing their current age as a factor in ignoring the news on alcopops. Even those who were in the target age range at the time positioned RTDs as drinks that other people drank. Others described it as purely a matter of politics: “...each party bickering at each other like they usually do about every issue...So it was just a lot of blah, blah, blah from either side of the house and not really anything constructive” (M50).

Discussion of the two alcopops news stories resulted in recognisable themes, as identified elsewhere [232]. The most common response, by far, was that consumption would be unaffected and drinkers would just switch drinks by substituting something cheaper. This was expressed by parents and young people alike, with some even relating it to recent experiences while drinking:
“Exactly the decision we made the other weekend, it was whether to buy pre-mixed vodka or normal vodka. We went with normal vodka because it was cheaper” (M32).

Even facing two sets of opposing data about the tax’s effect, where different news actors argued for different effects, people stuck to their position: “I think everyone here agrees that people will just find something else to drink if they can’t afford the alcopops” (M50). Of the eight groups, only two initially recognised that there were two distinct sets of data presented in the clip which concluded opposite effects. The remaining groups reported they did not understand the figures at all, or that the figures proved substitution occurred. Even when prompted by the facilitator to discuss the different results, they often negotiated a position that maintained substitution was the result: “I don’t know, it’s tough… there would have been at least a single individual in the country who drank less as a result... But I mean once you’ve already started down that path of wanting to get drunk and very drunk often, it wouldn’t really stop you.” (M24).

A second theme emerged, where a few displayed cynicism about the tax’s presumed concern for health, instead viewing it as a revenue-raising tax grab. Some characterised it as a sinister move by the government to receive money, without intending to solve any problems: “All I see is somebody’s cashing in somewhere” (M34). Participants engaged in hypothetical discussion of how they
thought consumption reduction might have occurred, including anecdotal evidence from personal experiences: “I don’t know I guess it is sort of true. I mean even nowadays you’d never ever see anyone drinking alcopops... maybe I’m just getting older” (M23). Others considered possible mechanisms for change, guessing that even with substitution, some people would still not be able to afford buying a bottle of spirits and would continue to buy alcopops, even if it meant buying less of them after the tax. One argued that drinks industry objections meant the tax had been effective, reasoning that if the tax wasn’t working they would be making more money from sales and so wouldn’t complain about the tax. Some conceded it might be part of package of solutions but doubted it would have a big impact on its own.

For those with little recall of the tax, seeing news clips did not clear up any confusion. Many thought it was difficult to know what to think and felt the news had not communicated information clearly enough: “They were saying there was a shift to increased purchasing of spirits, but that was kind of refuted. So you don’t really know unless you look at the figures yourself” (F46). One saw this as intrinsic to news production: “It’s designed to confuse you.” (M32), while another thought it represented vested interests: “You’ve got two parties that are both going to give you wrong data for whatever reasons to make themselves look good or to make a profit. So, I mean, it’s really, really questionable; the two sources in the news.” (M45).
Mistrust data

Across all clips, a pattern emerged of mistrusting research data presented in the broadcast, regardless of topic or news actor. Nothing was taken at face value, unless confirming their position. For example, when discussing advertising bans, many could not fathom the presented link between restrictions and subsequent reductions in morbidity: “I thought those figures sounded like it was a bit too good to be true. Like a 25 per cent reduction in, I think, alcohol consumption and a 30 per cent reduction in the road toll or something. The figures seemed a bit too high. I don’t know if I’d believe that…” (F28). When asked about their disbelief, participants cited not knowing enough about the research being reported, a disconnection with figures in general, and a lack of specificity: “There’s always figures within figures too. It’s 25 per cent of what? Is it 25 per cent of something that happened last month or is it over a year or…” (M45) “And is it everyone or is it just young people or…” (F46).

The changing nature of data was invoked discussing alcopops tax figures about consumption reduction: “It could be, well you might reduce it for a short period of time. But then in a year or two things might change.” (M51). This sentiment expressed in the parents’ group was also supported by younger people who suggested that data could be found by any interested party to fit their ideas. Even in the final advertising clip, where only one set of uncontested figures was
reported, they remained sceptical: “Yes, they just said research shows this and if you've lived in this society for even a small amount of time you know that a couple of years later research can just say something else” (M24).

**Drinking culture**

Though not directly asked, all groups keenly highlighted the ‘drinking culture’, which they viewed as more important to consumption than alcohol’s price or promotion. When pressed, their ability to articulate what the drinking culture was, or how it arose, was limited yet they expressed functioning within it. Parents expressed concern for children facing peer pressure in the current drinking culture, while others thought it was just part of our natural history: “...it's been part of our culture since we've been standing on two feet basically. So it’s really hard to sort of take a step away from that” (M32).

They could not clearly describe how it affected their drinking choices, but nevertheless, asserted that it did and, on the whole, denied advertising and price helped create or maintain the culture. Only one group openly considered this. Instead, it was viewed as the biggest obstacle to progress in reducing alcohol-related harms.
DISCUSSION

Our results provide fresh insight into audience responses to news stories about two alcohol policies and to what extent dominant news frames already identified in news coverage were present in audience understandings. We found that while participants agreed alcohol consumption in Australia causes significant social problems, this was tempered by scepticism that current policy options have the capacity to reduce these problems. This reflected, in part, misunderstandings of the extent to which policies are expected to work, as well as a lack of familiarity with the arguments and evidence for particular proposals. Participants also keenly emphasised the role of the ‘drinking culture’, which in Australia can involve increases in assault and hospitalisations around public holidays and cultural events [368]. Yet participants did not view current lack of alcohol regulations as connected in some way to the problematic culture they described. They viewed the place of alcohol in Australian culture as so deeply entrenched as to present a formidable and perhaps intractable barrier to the success of any policy.

Policy advocates can be heartened that dominant messages about alcohol-related harm identified in news media [338] are generally reflected in audience discussions, where people readily report understanding the ‘alcohol problem’, yet are less clear about the role for policy solutions. This represents a key area for policy advocacy: to continue current approaches to advocacy which seek to
move from defining the alcohol problem towards extended foci not just on solutions, but also explaining precisely how and to what extent these solutions work synergistically. Participants in this study reported limited understanding of alcohol policies beyond measures in place at licensed premises concerning alcohol sale. They rejected outright news narratives that pricing and promotions policies could provide viable solutions, reasoning they personally would not be affected by such factors, thus failing to see how policies connected to the problems they had earlier agreed existed. The challenge then concerns shaping dominant news narratives in such a way that audience members explicitly understand the evidence-based links which implicitly underlie alcohol experts’ policy advocacy in news media.

It is also clear that our audience members did not conceive of policies as set of options that work in concert, and instead thought of them individually, perceiving them doomed to failure. For example, our participants persistently understood the alcopops tax to have failed, despite existing data showing that the alcopops tax indeed produced overall net reductions in population consumption of alcohol [232, 285, 287, 369, 370]. For some this reflected disbelief that the tax could work in the first place. More importantly, for others this arose from their recall of the public discourse in the tax’s aftermath. For our participants, drinks industry framings identified in public discourse about ‘substitution’ were endorsed more often than public health framings that
asserted taxation affects consumption in predictable ways [232]. The substitution narrative was the most persistently expressed, regardless of age. In their experiences of the drinking culture, substitution more easily made sense than the more nebulous idea that it might work on a population-wide basis with a small net effect on consumption. As the tax is now long in place, correcting this misinformation is unlikely to be given any priority but it nevertheless provides useful information. Future policy advocacy, particularly around a volumetric tax, will need to reinforce not only that previous taxes have some measurable benefit, but also how exactly, this works at a community level rather than an individual one.

We note that since these discussions were conducted, the AARB has contributed to increased visibility of the issue of alcohol advertising and the potential for restrictions to help reduce problems. There has been attendant media coverage of both public health’s policy position and the alcohol industry’s response to the AARB [371-373]. While the effect of these activities on the public’s attitude has yet to be assessed, our results imply positive opportunities for future advocacy for possible legislation of alcohol advertising restrictions. Here, participants talked about restricting alcohol advertising in sport and preventing underage children from being exposed in a very similar way to public health narratives already identified in news coverage about advertising restrictions [354]. Yet encouragingly for advocates, participants did not oppose advertising restrictions
in similar ways to drink industry framings of the issue. For example, our groups did not state that the drinks industry was ‘already responsible enough’, nor did they perceive proposals to restrict advertising as signs of ‘nanny’ interfering needlessly in their lives [354]. Instead, they were more likely to object on the basis that they couldn’t see how advertising restrictions would actually be effective. This implies that arguments against advertising restrictions currently do not have the same traction among audience members as arguments for such restrictions and there is role here for advocates in increasing knowledge about how advertising restrictions could affect consumption and morbidity rates.

To capitalise on the existing situation, advocates might note the following:

knowledge of even the voluntary restrictions that exist was very low. No person we spoke with had heard of the ABAC scheme, nor did they know where complaints could be directed to regarding inappropriate advertising. This clearly points to the ongoing need for organisations such as the AARB to continue raising awareness of the issue. There was negligible understanding of the guidelines, with most only being familiar with a television curfew. This may reflect existing news coverage, where advertising was mostly referred to as ‘on television’ and stories focused on removing the curfew exemption for live sports broadcasts [354]. This suggests clear opportunities to improve knowledge of what exactly constitutes advertising and the standards to which it is expected to be held. This could tap into existing community concerns in a useful way: most
groups conditionally supported advertising restrictions in principle, with the highest support reserved for those that focused on reducing underage exposure to advertising. Future advocacy can be encouraged that gaining the public’s support for restrictions will be arguably more simple than gaining their support for taxation policies.

However, coupled with these findings was the clear notion from many participants that advertising simply did not affect them, or merely focused on changing brand preferences and purchasing decisions. We suggest then, that capitalising on the community’s existing concern for children will need to focus on how, exactly, restrictions work to protect younger members of society. Key messaging could clarify that not only does advertising work to shape brand preference among drinkers, it can arguably increase consumption, as well as help normalise and glamorise alcohol for those too young to be regular consumers – those who participants are already concerned about.

Our results suggest significant possibilities for future advocacy concerning the notion of the ‘drinking culture’, which participants saw as overwhelming any potential benefits produced by alcohol policies. Their inability to articulate how the drinking culture arose and their denial that alcohol’s availability, price and promotion contributed to creating or maintaining a drinking culture, is a key area to target for public discussions. Raising greater awareness of the ways in which
‘culture’ is amenable to change seems crucial, when audience groups see the current drinking culture as historically inevitable. We suggest that future advocacy can better explicate other instances where cultural change has been possible (e.g. tobacco, drink driving), as well as the ways that interest groups attempt to influence the definition of what ‘normal drinking’ is and make the links between alcohol advertising, pricing and the ‘culture’ explicitly clear.

In our groups, it seemed to only be parents who clearly articulated concern about vested interests for the drinks industry and partnerships with sporting organisations, while younger participants were not as concerned. Like taxation, this may reflect a gap between their perceived individual experience of advertising having no effect on them and policies that focus on the population. Future advocacy concerning vested interests might encourage members of the audience to think less of their individual experiences and more about other, more vulnerable members of the community.

Lastly, advocacy should be aware of the lasting mistrust of statistics and figures presented in the broadcast. Our results show that audience members reported narratives from news broadcasts, not memories of statistics. Our suggestion then is that when presenting data, strong narratives about its significance and the impact of policies will be more important than quoting specific figures such as the expected percentage in mortality reduction.
CONCLUSION

News coverage of alcohol stories has resulted in strong audience understanding of alcohol-related problems. However, the news framing of alcohol policy solutions has not always provided a clear cut-through message that audiences can understand, despite being supportive of policies as evidenced here. Future advocacy, particularly for taxation measures, will need to continue the recent moves that address the links between the drinking culture and factors such as alcohol’s promotion. For both alcohol’s price and promotion, future advocacy might help facilitate understandings of how this ‘drinking culture’ is amenable to change through the use of evidence-based policies.

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CHAPTER 9: IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This thesis found that news coverage of alcohol is extensive and consistently frames the news on alcohol consumption as hazardous to health, with manifold social and economic harms for individuals and society at large. Public health’s position that problematic consumption of alcohol should be addressed is represented again and again, through the dominant news frames chosen and the appearance of experts to provide commentary on the risks and the actions and policy reforms needed. While news coverage of problematic consumption of alcohol is rich in detail, my results show that reporting of alcohol policy proposals to reduce harm is presented through a variety of contested news frames. In turn this is reflected in scepticism commonly voiced by audiences that policy proposals represent real solutions, as discussed further below.

Content analyses results

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 dealt with the content of news reports about alcohol across a wide timeframe. Like most areas of health-related news [303, 374], television news reports over five years were triggered largely by particular events or the release of new research findings. Close to a third of television news stories reported on the negative effects of alcohol consumption, such as death, injury or alcohol-related assault or acute effects such as hangovers and absenteeism. Less than five per cent of stories reported on any health benefits of consuming
alcohol. However, a gap in the coverage was identified concerning long-term health effects. Only a tenth of television news reports make clear links to longer term health effects such as cancer, echoing previous American research [215].

Alcohol policies were mentioned in 63% of television news reports yet few reports focussed on any given policy at any length, though this is perhaps typical of television news cycles in general. The most commonly reported policies included restricting alcohol’s availability and measures to reduce drink-driving. Education and awareness campaigns were also reported regularly, but evidence-based policies related to alcohol taxation were only present in a tenth of clips, and prior to 2011, alcohol advertising restrictions were mentioned in less than 5% of television news stories.

More specific examination of particular policies in newspaper coverage across shorter time frames revealed highly contested arguments. With regard to the alcopops tax, 52% of all statements recorded supported the tax, arguing for its health benefits or effect on consumption, with 48% of statements opposing its introduction, dismissing its health benefits and arguing for a ‘substitution’ effect. The key finding here is that only a fifth of all statements bolstered their arguments using existing Australian data on the actual impact of the tax, and instead relied upon the power of narratives to carry their argument to readers.
This finding is discussed in relation to audience understandings of news broadcasts in the section on implications further below.

At the time analyses were conducted, policy proposals to restrict alcohol advertising were found to have low newsworthiness. They were rarely featured as the main topic of any news report, instead being bundled into more general stories about preventive health or alcohol related harms. Advertising was constructed in the news as related to sport, or as appearing on television, without introducing to the news frame the many varieties of advertising that occur through traditional mediums such as radio or newspapers and also through non-traditional mediums such as the internet or event sponsorship. This perhaps suggests an area for future advocacy to target. Likewise, advertising ‘restrictions’ were seldom specified, sometimes leaving the reader to draw a conclusion about what was meant by ‘restrictions’, but when specified, restrictions referred to those affecting the timing and placement of advertisements. Restrictions on content were not mentioned as often and there was relatively little mention of the existing ABAC guidelines.

Thus, across all three analyses, the ‘problem of alcohol’ was clearly defined and reported, yet narratives concerning policy solutions were disputed and challenged by representatives of industries with vested interests. These findings suggest a significant role for more unified and explicitly voiced proposals for the
future, as well as consistent reinforcement that the ‘problem’ is well overdue for such solutions. Alcohol experts and advocates are well placed to do this, as across all three analyses, public health professionals were the most commonly appearing category of news actor present in television and newspaper coverage. This implies that decisions regarding news production regularly favour seeking comment from alcohol experts and advocates in response to news stories. Our results show that the challenge for advocates is focused less on ensuring public conversations concerning alcohol occur, and more on refining the nature of the conversation through attempts to reframe the content of such conversations more toward explicit solutions.

**Expert news actors’ priorities**

Given the findings that alcohol experts and advocates appeared frequently in the news, with suggestions to refine and stimulate the existing public conversation, we sought to identify what alcohol experts’ priorities were with regard to alcohol policy reform.

Experts emphasised the synergistic nature of policy solutions – that all policies work in concert to produce effects and that no single policy was capable of creating change alone. Their top priorities included regulating alcohol’s availability, affecting changes to alcohol’s price through taxation and minimum pricing, and introducing effective controls for alcohol advertising. Experts were
unanimous that volumetric taxation represents an effective and much needed solution, with predictions for its successful introduction largely dependent on the changing nature of the political environment. Likewise, there was general agreement about the need to act on alcohol advertising restrictions, yet there were differences of opinion regarding the specific nature of policy reform, suggesting that there could be greater effort given to dissemination of the policy position to all potential advocates through the sector.

_Audience understandings of alcohol policy news stories_

Our analyses of audience understandings of alcohol and associated policies found clear agreement that alcohol poses problems to health and society, reflecting the emphases found in the news content analyses. However, on the whole, our audience members reported high scepticism that policy solutions could conceivably work and tended to view each policy individually, as separate and unrelated entities. This highlighted that audiences do not often understand the synergistic relationship of policies in the same way that the experts reported in this thesis understand this relationship. Nor are audiences used to thinking of alcohol policies having an effect at a population level, rather than at an individual one. Audiences keenly emphasised the ‘drinking culture’ but denied the culture was affected by alcohol’s price or promotion, highlighting a difference between their understanding and experts’ understanding, where experts and advocates alike took this for granted as self-evidently true.
An unexpected finding of the audience research concerns their common mistrust of both data and of any advocate who appeared on the news. Audiences viewed each ‘talking head’ in the news clips they watched as having a vested interest. They did not appear to distinguish between ‘types’ of vested interests or different types of news actor. When asked about health professionals’ motives in appearing on the news, they could not articulate exactly what the relevant vested interest might be, but mistrusted it all the same, apparently equating the scale of these interests with those of drinks industry representatives.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY ADVOCACY**

The key findings reported in this thesis represent several areas of consideration for researchers and policy advocates with an interest in advocating for the introduction and preservation of evidence based policy solutions to reduce harms associated with alcohol. Namely, further deliberation and strategic planning is required to answer outstanding questions regarding the evidence base for policies, to understand the characteristics, values and understandings of target audience for such appearances, and achieving sectoral agreement around key messaging.

This sectoral agreement should be sought not just among heads of organisations but also among potential advocates who may wish to join future public
discussions. The protracted history of introducing effective policy solutions in tobacco control, such as the progressive introduction of smoke free areas moving from public transport to workplaces, to restaurants and bars, and to confined or densely populated outdoor areas like stadia and shopping malls, shows that policy advocacy can require a long term focus over decades and the next generation of researchers and advocates will need to be aware of stated policy goals and familiarise themselves with arguing key positions of opponents [375].

**Alcohol advertising restrictions and the evidence base**

The findings from the sub-studies of this thesis imply that greater clarity is needed regarding the debate around advertising restrictions and the role of evidence in moving news debates forward. Further academic research about advertising’s relationship with alcohol consumption is warranted to solidify the base from which advocates make their arguments within scientific and scholarly debate, yet this may not be the necessary ingredient prescribed for effective conversation with the general public via news coverage. Our discussions with audiences show that even strong evidence is not a pivotal argument in and of itself – that mistrust of data, or confusion about their significance, can lead audiences to decode meaning from the news from either an oppositional standpoint, or solely through the prism of personal experience. While some experts discussed the need for more evidence and others were steadfast that
action on alcohol advertising is warranted regardless of the evidence base, audiences already concede the necessity for action yet doubt its capacity to work.

Plainly, news media advocacy can continue to reinforce the need for alcohol advertising restrictions, yet this need not be the sole focus. Moving forward, strategic advocacy should note that audience members already agree that there is a need for restrictions. Instead, future advocacy could focus on the audience’s need to understand how restrictions can have an impact on abstract “statistical” goals such as reduced morbidity and mortality rates. Providing a strong narrative for audiences that links the policy to outcomes, by explicitly describing the mechanism by which it is expected to work, would be most useful. For example, in the case of the alcopops tax, audiences particularly remembered and agreed with narratives about ‘substitution’, an argument which benefited from audiences’ perceived understanding of the mechanism by which substitution would work (i.e. they could see how people might just switch to buying cheaper alcohol, thus undermining the policy). A similar narrative approach may be needed to clarify for the public the mechanism by which restrictions would affect consumption or mortality rates, given that audiences reported they could not see a link themselves. News advocacy could explain how it works, emphasise that such an approach is backed up by available evidence, yet need not quote
exact statistics or figures, in deference to audience mistrust of specific data presented on the news.

Making these links clearer may indeed shift the conversation that was noted in newspaper coverage, where arguments for and against dominated, yet were not clearly resolved. In this vein, the differences in perspective noted among experts in this study about the evidence base or the type of restrictions required, perhaps become beside the point. Capitalising on existing audience sentiment could see news advocacy efforts attempt to reframe the debate with a stronger focus on how alcohol advertising is linked to consumption, and how consumption then in turn affects the level of harm experienced by the community. Likewise, assisting audiences to recognise non-traditional promotional avenues (e.g. internet promotions or corporate social responsibility initiatives, such as Jim Beam’s “Drink Smart” Initiative [376]) as alcohol advertising in the first place would assist to generate a broader community consensus about the size and scope of the problem. Using clear, repeated narratives to highlight the specific way reductions in advertising flow onto reductions in consumption levels provides the audience with a framework to understand the goals of the policy, without being forced to debate the evidence – sometimes for little gain in the end. Indeed, in conversation after the focus groups, some participants changed their minds once their questions could be answered outside the confines of the study. This is not to say, however, that questions of the evidence base are
superfluous – just that recognition is required that some sectors of the audience as not as swayed by evidence as advocacy may prefer and this is further discussed below.

**Gaps between ‘lay’ and ‘expert’ discourses: who are the target audiences for media advocacy?**

News media advocacy efforts have often traditionally sought to reach (i) the general public, to gain support for new proposals, and (ii) policy makers in positions of power who can effect change and whose agenda can be affected by the concerns of the community. The experts reported here were clear that their intended audience was both the public and particular policy makers. However, in combination with the audience research, these findings reveal potential challenges for the success of using news media reports to communicate with both audiences simultaneously.

Our results suggest a clear gap between expert and audience understandings of the matters at issue and particularly, the nature of proposed solutions. In short, while advocacy has traditionally benefited from bringing community concern to bear on policy agendas, this nexus of influence can be thwarted when members of the public do not agree that the solutions proposed, and agreed upon by experts, make sense or are viable. In this sample, audiences persistently believed that an existing policy, the alcopops tax, had failed to make any impact, despite
all experts citing knowledge of both its specific impact and the impact of taxation
measures more generally around the world. It would appear that messages
about the success of previous pricing policies have not filtered through to a more
common understanding among audience members despite the evident expert
consensus.

Clearly a crucial implication of this research involves anticipating the information
the audience will require to comprehend various alcohol policy issues. Equally
important will be analytical work to understand the important values subtexts
(such as public safety, industry self-interest, protecting the young growing brain
from alcohol damage) in which this information should be most productively
embedded or associated [260, 377, 378]. These may be different to the
parameters for advocacy when addressing policy makers outside of the news
arena. Provision of such information and strategic communication decisions
arising from analysis of the value subtexts can assist different audience segments
to better understand and gain perspective on the policy debates. Negative
aspects of alcohol consumption are largely undisputed by the public, yet
expectations around policy proposals are low. Advocacy clearly has a role in
emphasising that the audience’s concern for alcohol problems, and that their size
and scope justifies the need for responsive action.
A key question arises for advocacy efforts then, of what the specific aims of alcohol policy advocacy should be and where to target efforts so that key messages have their greatest impact. Is it better to target policy makers in positions of power outside the channels of news advocacy, the community in general via the news or to concurrently run strategies that target each? With regard to advertising restrictions, in the face of current government suggestions to monitor the situation without introducing legislative change, it may be that assisting to educate members of the general public via the news about how restrictions produce effects that may not be felt individually but still benefit the community should become the key policy advocacy goal. Shifting this policy up the news agenda so that it attracts attention in its own right and not merely as part of other general stories about health is vital, something recognised by groups like the AARB. In turn, bringing advocacy messages to the wide news audience and engaging the community’s concern can complement and strengthen advocacy efforts that target politicians and policy makers directly through their offices.

Another key finding concerns the gap between ‘expert’ and ‘lay’ notions about why advocates and experts appear in the news. Though we did not specifically examine expert constructions of news media audiences, expert interviewees did comment on their willingness to participate in news advocacy: “...in general don’t get paid a cent for it, it takes a lot of time and I get pretty close to zero profit
from it. I think the public they know that - they know that we’re in it basically for the right reasons.” This would seem to be in stark contrast to how audiences in general perceived appearances of any news actor, regardless of their particular position or who they represented: “It seemed to me that whoever was doing the research found data to fit their opinion... So they could probably find anything to fit their ideas I guess.”

This distrust of news sources and news media has been identified in other Australian research concerning food risks, with people citing similar confusion about the changing nature of research findings and the perception that the news reported that ‘everything’ was ‘risky’ [379]. However, encouragingly, some participants differentiated between the ‘news’ and particular publications, investigative reporting formats, or documentaries from trusted sources. Likewise, health experts were trusted sources in particular contexts such as discrete bodies of government like the Health Department, or from particular organisations like the National Heart Foundation. This implies that within the right context, mistrust of experts can be reduced, suggesting a role for clearer identification in news broadcasts of exactly who or what a news actor is representing.
Unpacking notions of the ‘drinking culture’

The results of the studies combined show that members of the public, alcohol policy experts and those producing the news on alcohol view the existing ‘drinking culture’ as problematic. However, there is a clear disjunction between lay and expert discourses of why the culture exists, the factors that contribute to its continued existence and its capacity for change in the long term. Audiences found themselves unable to articulate how the culture arose, seeing it as an inevitable part of life to negotiate, while experts were certain that the culture is heavily influenced by the way that alcohol is marketed and retailed.

The major implication of these findings is that news media advocacy may benefit from a broader discussion not just of the harms that arise from such a ‘drinking culture’ but also further efforts to educate and clarify for audiences how industries with vested interests attempt to manipulate and maintain what is considered ‘normal’ with regard to alcohol [87]. Despite audiences being mistrustful of the news actors who appeared in news stories, they did not often voice this suspicion in terms of economic interests for producers and distributors of alcohol. Alcohol experts who take for granted that audiences understand that the drinks industry have a vested economic interest in avoiding further regulation may do well to spell this out more clearly on occasion, drawing comparison to other industries where vested interests have been exposed as
profiting from opposition to legislated policies, for example, tobacco or random breath testing [380, 381].

In doing so, not only can advocates help audiences to understand important parallels between industry opposition to tobacco control and industry opposition to alcohol control, but advocates can also highlight other times where what was considered ‘normal’ for culture shifted, over time, through progressively introducing policies which may have been unpopular initially as well. For example, though random breath testing was initially opposed by politicians and news media alike, it is now an accepted part of everyday society and through its success in reducing deaths, produced what Homel terms “moral deterrence”, that is changes in attitudes towards drink driving [382].

Unity and cohesion among all alcohol advocates in the sector

Lastly, the results of this thesis have implications for alcohol policy experts and advocates who wish to speak to policy reform with a united voice: to ‘sing from the same (policy advocacy) song sheet’. In the media content studies and analysis of experts’ priorities, some important differences on policy positions arose. Though these analyses concluded with arguing for greater cohesion amid the sector with regard to policy positions and priorities, we note that significant changes have already begun to emerge in the sector that attempt to address the issue. Namely, the formation of a variety of alcohol policy alliances, such as the
National Alliance for Action on Alcohol, the Alcohol Policy Coalition (see Table 1:2, Chapter 2), or the more recently formed NSW/ACT Alcohol Policy Alliance [362], with increasing memberships composed of organisations with an interest in health and alcohol related harm.

In recognition of these changes that progressive unity around policy positions is becoming more evident at a high level in organisations, the concern is around dissemination of these positions to potential advocates throughout the sector who do not yet have a public voice on the issues or who are less connected to these networks. Improved mechanisms for dissemination of policy positions to all those who might have a voice in different arenas should be a key goal, as well as establishing or continuing to maintain collaborative partnerships with organisations that already have an interest in alcohol policy reform.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS**

Chapter 3 reviewed the existing literature regarding news media reporting of alcohol and related policies, as well as audiences’ responses to such stories. The review identified some absences in the literature, which this thesis has sought to address through its series of related studies.

The literature review found that since the 1990s the general topic of alcohol and news media has received some specific attention, but when compared with
alcohol advertising where my literature search found 247 articles, the research focus has been relatively small with only 30 papers found to be relevant. This thesis adds five published papers to the literature, expanding the breadth of research attention accordingly. In addition, the literature review did not find recent work specifically related to the Australian context, where policy goals and political environments may differ from other countries. This potentially affects the viability of advocacy suggestions arising from that ‘overseas’ literature. This thesis therefore provided data specifically related to Australian policies and the Australian media environment, offering up to date information that local experts and advocates can use when planning strategic advocacy campaigns for particular policy proposals.

The findings of this thesis are also strengthened by taking, where possible, national and local approaches to news coverage: the thesis examines national newspapers, as well as newspapers from a range of metropolitan centres, which has not always been the case with previous studies. Additionally, alcohol experts and advocates were sought from locations around Australia, in order to provide extensive data from different sources which may affect local coverage of the issues. Due to economic constraints, we were unable to examine a range of television stations from around the country, but nevertheless examined national broadcasts, such as National Nine News [383] where possible.
The existing literature also focuses almost exclusively on analysing the content of news, with only six papers identified assessing audience responses to the news and only one paper [165] which included some reference to the opinions of alcohol advocates (beyond analysing their contributions in the content of the coverage). This thesis contributed one publication regarding experts’ and advocates’ immediate views, which allows for a direct comparison to be made between experts’ stated policy objectives and messages identified in current news reporting. Likewise, this thesis contributes to the literature one publication concerning audience understandings and the meanings they decode from news reports about alcohol, and their response to the presentation of some experts’ views about alcohol policies.

Lastly, much of the previous research has focused on news coverage of alcohol generally, or within all stories related to tobacco, alcohol and drugs. This thesis not only covers general reporting of alcohol, but also provides extensive data concerning two specific policy approaches: alcohol pricing and promotion. These policies represent two out of three of the global top priorities in the current gold standard in prevention of alcohol related harm [38, 43]. This thesis provides some of the first specific data about alcohol’s price and promotion in the Australian news context, linked to expert commentary and audience reactions.
FUTURE RESEARCH

News production studies

While this thesis addressed the content of news, priorities of alcohol policy advocates and experts who appear on the news, and audience reactions to such news stories, a key piece of the puzzle involves those who produce the news. Namely, this thesis did not investigate either editorial managers or journalists and the processes by which alcohol related harm becomes news stories. Future research should examine why alcohol is newsworthy to journalists and television news producers. Additionally future research should consider examining how decisions are made to feature particular news actors or to not feature other news actors, or frame a story in particular ways.

Other news contexts

There are two key areas of consideration that were not addressed by the studies in this thesis. The news content studies reported here focused on readily available sources of news through national and local newspapers, as well as five Sydney-based television studies. It should be acknowledged that news reporting also occurs both online, through a variety of independent websites (e.g. Crikey, New Matilda) [384, 385] and also on pay television networks, which source news broadcast from overseas or cover the news on Australian channels, such Sky News Australia [386]. Future analyses should consider both the reporting of alcohol policy stories in these contexts, as well as the size of the audience these
mediums reach. If tangible differences are established in the reporting of the news on alcohol, or in audience reach, the findings reported here regarding audience perceptions of the news on alcohol cannot be generalised across these contexts. Future research should consider the reporting of alcohol policies in these contexts, as well as the increasing capacity for audiences to cultivate their own news environment through the use of RSS feeds, as mentioned by participants in these group discussions.

Alcohol advertising and online marketing

Lastly, in broader terms, policies to restrict or regulate alcohol advertising do not at present sufficiently address the capacity for alcohol producers and distributors to use online avenues while marketing alcohol. It has been demonstrated in other areas of public health like tobacco control that industries have a substantial online presence and have been found to circumvent existing regulations through use of websites such as YouTube [387], Facebook [190, 342, 388] or Twitter [389, 390] to present branded material, and/or benefit from user generated content and user membership of groups.

Given the global nature of many alcohol companies, the capacity for Australian local advertising guidelines to affect the activities of websites located in other countries should be assessed. This represents one of the largest challenges in alcohol policy implementation, necessitating a key focus for the future.
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APPENDIX 1: UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY POLICY ON

SUBMISSION OF PhD BY PUBLICATION
PhD: Submission of Doctor of Philosophy Theses Containing Published Work

Approved by: Academic Board on 14 August 2002
Date of effect: 15 August 2002
Amended by: Academic Board on 11 July 2007

1. Policy
This policy clarifies the requirements outlined in Chapter 4, clause 4.22 of the University of Sydney (Higher Degree by Research) Rule 2011 regarding submission of publications in support of candidature.

2. Background
The University of Sydney (Higher Degree by Research) Rule 2011 provides that:
4.22 Where a thesis includes publications, or part thereof, of which the student is the sole or joint author, the student must also submit such publications, and produce evidence to identify satisfactorily the parts of the work for which the student is responsible.

This policy clarifies the Academic Board requirements in respect of the above clause.

3. Coverage
This policy applies to all candidates for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

4. Procedures
(1) For the purposes of Chapter 4, clause 4.22 of the University of Sydney (Higher Degree by Research) Rule 2011, a candidate may include in a thesis (whether in the body, or in one or more appendices) one or more published works of which the candidate is the sole or joint author.

(2) Any theses submitted for examination must be submitted and examined in accordance with the Academic Board Resolutions relating to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, including any and all statements required from the supervisor and candidate as appropriate.

(3) In addition to the statement referred to in (2) above, a candidate who includes one or more published works in the body of the thesis of which the candidate is not the sole author, must provide evidence to identify satisfactorily the sections of the work for which the candidate is responsible.

(4) For the purposes of (3) above, the Academic Board will accept a signed written statement from all authors of a work attesting to the contribution of the candidate as evidence to satisfactorily identify the sections of the work for which the candidate is responsible. Where it is impractical or not possible to contact all the authors, the relevant Faculty may request that the Graduate Studies Committee waive this requirement.

(5) The Academic Board may accept other forms of evidence, on application from a candidate, not inconsistent with (4) above and consistent with the University of Sydney (Intellectual Property) Rule 2002 and the University of Sydney...

(6) If a candidate chooses to include one or more published works in the body of the thesis, the candidate must ensure that the thesis is a consistent and unified whole, prepared specifically for the submission of examination for the degree. The candidate needs to critically place any published works used in the body of the thesis in the context of the appropriate field of study and in the context of the thesis as a whole.

(7) If a candidate chooses to include one or more published works in the body of the thesis, the candidate must ensure that the thesis is presented in such a way that the examiners can assess the requirements required by the University, including whether in the opinion of the examiner the thesis is a substantially original contribution to the knowledge of the subject concerned, the thesis affords evidence of originality by the discovery of new facts, the thesis affords evidence of originality by the exercising of independent critical ability, and the thesis is satisfactory as regards to literary presentation.

(8) A candidate may only include a published work if the research and publication of the work occurred during the course of candidature for the degree.

(9) Examiners will be advised on the University position regarding the inclusion of one or more published works in the body of the thesis, or as one or more appendices, and examiners who express concern regarding a candidate’s mastery of the subject matter will be encouraged to recommend an additional oral examination to satisfy any concerns where they deem it necessary.

5. Authority

(1) Development/consultation
This policy was developed by the Postgraduate Research Training Sub-Committee of the Graduate Studies Committee and approved by the Academic Board.

(2) Management responsibility
Graduate Studies Office

(3) Implementation and monitoring
Graduate Studies Office with advice to the Graduate Studies Committee.

(4) Review
1 August 2004.

(5) Communication
Graduate Studies Office

(6) Contact
Graduate Studies Office (9114 1302, email: gradstudies.office@sydney.edu.au)

6. Related information

(1) Related University legislation, resolutions, policies and procedures include:
(a) University of Sydney (Higher Degree by Research) Rule 2011
(b) Resolutions of the Academic Board relating to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
(c) University of Sydney (Intellectual Property) Rule 2002
(d) University of Sydney Code of Conduct for Responsible Research Practice and Guidelines for Dealing with Allegations of Research Misconduct
Sydney School of Public Health Policy

Publishing is the essence of science, and learning to publish is an important component of learning to conduct scientific research.

In offering the option to include publications in a thesis, the University hopes to encourage research candidates to publish throughout their candidature. The publication process allows candidates to engage with the broader scientific community and validates and confirms the candidate’s work along the way. The ability to accept critical comment and disseminate findings within the constraints of publications is a valuable skill that takes time to develop and will prove valuable throughout the candidate’s future career in research.

In recognition of this the University has introduced the provision where theses containing published work may be submitted for examination. It is important to note that a collection of disparate publications, no matter what their quality, would NOT be appropriate for the award of the degree. On the contrary, the expectation is that the candidature was planned and supervised in a responsible manner as an integrated project, and that the publications presented in the thesis constitute elements of a connected whole, as they would as chapters in a thesis prior to publication. That being the case, the key questions that examiners will then need to address are:

- whether the thesis is a substantially original contribution to the knowledge of the subject concerned
- for publications where there are multiple authors, whether the quality and extent of the student’s contribution merits the award of the degree

The purpose of this paper is to provide guidance on the practical issues of submitting in this way.

The University of Sydney (Amendment Act) Rule 1999 (as amended) provides that:

“85. (2) A candidate may submit in support of the candidature any publication of which the candidate is the sole or joint author. In such a case the candidate must provide evidence to identify satisfactorily the sections of the work for which the candidate is responsible.”

For the purposes of Part 10, Division 4, 85(2) of the University of Sydney (Amendment Act) Rule 1999 (as amended), a candidate may include in a thesis (whether in the body, or in one or more appendices) one or more published works of which the candidate is the sole or joint author.

Acknowledgement of others

(a) Co-authors

The Academic Board will accept a signed written statement from all authors of a work attesting to the contribution of the candidate as evidence to satisfactorily identify the sections of the work for which the candidate is responsible. Where papers have multiple authorship, the candidate would normally be the first or principal author and have written permission of the co-authors. Each jointly authored paper incorporated in the thesis must include a clear statement on the contribution made by each author. The statements must be sufficiently detailed to describe accurately the contribution of each
author; must be signed by each author; and must be incorporated in either the body of
the thesis, or in one or more of its appendices.

(b) **Proof readers or editors of theses**
When a thesis has had the benefit of editorial advice then the name of the editor and a
brief description of the service rendered should be printed as part of the list of
acknowledgements or other prefatory matter near the front of the work when it is to be
presented for examination.
If the professional editor’s current or former area of academic specialization is similar to
that of the candidate, this too should be stated in the prefatory matter.

**Format of the thesis**

(a) **Abstract**
The abstract should summarise the main findings presented in each paper and should
indicate how the included works, when considered together, demonstrate a significant
contribution to knowledge of the subject concerned. It should, in chronological order,
list the publications being presented for examination.

(b) **Introductory chapter**
The introductory chapter should contain succinct statements describing the research
problem investigated, overall objectives and specific aims of the study and an account of
research progress linking the scientific papers. The account of research progress must
link together the various papers submitted as part of the thesis providing continuity for
the whole thesis so that the reader can understand the logic behind the progression of
the research program. The candidate needs to critically place any published works used
in the body of the thesis in the context of the appropriate field of study and in the
context of the thesis as a whole.

(c) **Literature review**
The literature review should, out of necessity, replicate literature cited in subsequent
chapters but should contain a clear statement on the significance of the thesis aims,
critical review of relevant literature, identification of knowledge gaps and the
relationship of the literature to the experimental program.

(d) **Discussion**
The thesis must contain an overarching discussion of the main features of the thesis
including, *inter alia*, the principal significance of the findings, problems encountered and
future directions of the work. The discussion should not include a detailed reworking of
the discussions from individual papers within the thesis.

**Examination process**
All theses must be presented for examination. The successful publication of articles will
not render the work exempt from examination. Because the publications are examined
as part of a larger work it is possible for reviewers of individual papers to be invited to
act as examiners.
Due to the potential for conflict of interest, co-authors would not normally be
considered suitable as thesis examiners.
Examiners will be advised on the University’s position regarding the inclusion of one or
more published works in the body of the thesis, or as one or more appendices, and
examiners who express concern regarding a candidate’s mastery of the subject matter
will be encouraged to recommend an additional oral examination to satisfy any concerns
where they deem it necessary.

**Related policies**
1) Search by keyword for related University legislation, resolutions, policies and procedures [http://www.usyd.edu.au/policy/]:
(a) PhD: Submission of Doctor of Philosophy Theses Containing Published Work
(b) University of Sydney (Amendment Act) Rule 1999 (as amended):
(c) Resolutions of the Academic Board relating to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy:
(d) University of Sydney (Intellectual Property) Rule 2002:
(e) University of Sydney Code of Conduct for Responsible Research Practice and Guidelines for Dealing with Allegations of Research Misconduct at
(f) Proof-reading and editing of theses and dissertations
FAQs
Do these rules only apply to PhD candidates?
No. Masters by research candidates are permitted to submit in this way too.
Can I include unpublished work as well as published work?
Yes. The thesis may be based on published and unpublished work. Where unpublished work is included, it should be presented as a “traditional” chapter, rather than a published paper, unless it is in press, awaiting publication
Can I include papers that are not directly related to the thesis?
A collation of unrelated papers would not constitute a thesis by publication. Papers not contributing to the main thrust of the thesis would at best be suitable for inclusion in an appendix or could be listed following the under the heading 'Additional Publications by the Candidate Relevant to the Thesis but not Forming Part of it'.
Can I include papers that have been rejected?
Manuscripts which have been rejected by a journal must not be included unless they have been substantially rewritten to address referees’ comments.
Can I include papers that I authored before I was a candidate for the degree?
A candidate may only include a published work if the research and publication of the work occurred during the course of candidature for the degree.
How many papers do I need to include to submit in this way?
There is no minimum requirement. The thesis can contain any number of papers; however a thesis presented purely by publications should probably include at least three papers. Of equal, or perhaps more importance than quantity, is quality of the journals.
How should the papers be incorporated in the thesis?
Papers can be incorporated in the thesis in any or all of the following ways:
• Passages from published papers can be quoted verbatim (or in appropriately edited form and referenced) into one or more chapters of the thesis.
• A published paper or an accepted manuscript can form a single chapter (or several papers may form successive chapters) without any editing.
• An original reprint of the paper(s) can be directly bound into the thesis or inserted as a photocopy (where paper size of the reprint differs from that of the thesis).
Why are the introduction and conclusion chapters so important?
The introduction and conclusion chapters need not be overly long but will be very important in ensuring that the individual publications that make up the thesis can be viewed by the examiners as a cohesive unified whole. If the publications do not have a clear cohesion, then the thesis may attract criticism and be rejected by examiners.
What if the introduction and conclusion chapters are not published?
The introduction, conclusion and bridging sections between publications do not have to be publications in their own right. In addition, for a candidature where considerable effort was expended in developing and validating research methods, it may be
appropriate to have a methods chapter, that would give the candidate an opportunity to describe this in more detail (i.e., to a much greater extent than would normally be allowed in a peer-reviewed journal article). The ability to critically evaluate research methods is an important component of a research candidature, and so the opportunity should be taken, where appropriate, to demonstrate mastery of this to the examiners.

**Why publish at all?**
- Experience in publication writing is valuable to candidates seeking to make the transition to postdoctoral positions.
- Publications would normally form part of a CV that a candidate would submit to potential employers.
- If you have reviewers' comments on your papers before submitting your thesis, you can use this feedback to improve your thesis. This will not only improve the quality of your thesis but also your confidence. By the time you submit the thesis for examination, at least part of it will have been subjected to the scrutiny of other experts in the field.
- In the event of disagreement between examiners, the thesis will be easier to defend if it has already been subjected to a peer-reviewed process as it will already be established as worthy of publication, which is one of the criteria for thesis examination. The larger the proportion that is published, the easier it is for your examiners and the Board of Postgraduate Studies to recognise that your work is substantial and valuable.
- It resolves the conflict between preparing the thesis for examination and preparing papers for publication. You won't feel that when you are spending time on your papers you are running out of time to prepare your thesis.

**Is there anything that should not be included?**
Typically, the submission should not include review articles (except where the article take the place of a literature review and has been peer reviewed), newspaper articles, articles in nonrefereed professional journals, work that had already been submitted successfully or unsuccessfully for the award of a degree at any university, or works where the applicant's role was that of editor.

**Is there a sample statement of authentication I can adopt?**
Statement of Authentication

*This thesis is submitted to the University of Sydney in fulfilment of the requirement is for the Degree of Master of...../Doctor of Philosophy.*

*The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.*

*Signature:......................................................... Date: .............................................*

**Are there any pitfalls of submitting in this way?**
The decision to submit a thesis in the form of a series of published or unpublished articles should be given careful consideration. In particular, candidates should note that submitting a series of papers is not a universally accepted practice. Moreover, it is likely, especially with published articles along one theme, that there will be considerable repetition across the work which may detract from the presentation of the thesis. For these reasons, candidates may wish to consider modifying the electronic versions of papers so that the thesis reads as a more coherent whole.
APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY TABLE OF LITERATURE RELATED TO NEWS REPORTING OF ALCOHOL AND AUDIENCE UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE NEWS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Media Type</th>
<th>Main Topic</th>
<th>Period covered</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holder et al</td>
<td>1994 &amp; 1997</td>
<td>Television Newspapers</td>
<td>Drink driving, enforcement &amp; Community Trials Project</td>
<td>1992-1996</td>
<td>Content &amp; framing</td>
<td>Intervention (media advocacy training) vs. control communities found: Increased drink driving coverage in intervention communities Increased public perception of personal risk of being detected while drink driving Media advocacy is effective reinforcer of police efforts to reduce DUI News media advocacy more effective than paid public service announcements in raising community awareness</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jernigan Dorfman</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Television (ABC, CBS, NBC)</td>
<td>36 days, 10% of all news</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
<td>43 stories about drugs, alcohol, tobacco Illegal drugs stories dominate, only 7 stories about alcohol: 4 on taxes, 3 incidental mentions</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorfman, Woodruff Chavez Wallack</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Local TV Network TV</td>
<td>Youth and violence</td>
<td>12 days in 1993</td>
<td>Framing</td>
<td>5,141 local news stories: only 79 mentioned alcohol, mostly focused on drink driving (30 stories) and crime (18), followed by alcohol taxation (9), recreational use (6), alcohol industry (6), alcoholism treatment (4), prevention (3) 214 hours; 1,791/8,021 stories related to youth and violence; episodic framing 5 times more frequent than thematic coverage; only one story had explicit public health frame; very limited coverage of aetiological factors like alcohol = missed opportunity to advocate for prevention</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones-Webb et al</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Newspapers (12 national, 15 black-oriented local)</td>
<td>Alcohol control policies</td>
<td>1993-95</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
<td>More similarities than differences between mainstream and black-oriented local papers Limiting alcohol advertising the most frequently covered policy in both papers</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Economic policies like taxation covered in greater detail in mainstream papers.
Greater coverage of advertising over economic policies in black-oriented papers mostly due to awareness campaigns about alcohol advertising targeting African Americans.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Health Content</th>
<th>Content Analysis</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dorfman et al 1998</td>
<td>TV,</td>
<td>Health stories Youth</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
<td>Less than 4% of health stories are about alcohol; alcohol marginalised by illicit drug stories. Newspapers: 7,680 stories, only 71 had alcohol in the headline; 32 were incidental mentions, 3 related to drink driving; 26 had alcohol as the main topic and looked at outlet density, assault, marketing, treatments. Reporting mostly episodic and blames the individual; need better media advocacy by alcohol experts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lemmens, Vaeth, Greenfield 1999</td>
<td>Newspapers (5 national) Alcohols &amp; federal law on alcohol warning labels</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
<td>1,677 relevant articles: 734 talked about alcohol dependence (i.e. an issue for the individual), 589 took a public health approach, with a major focus on drink driving. Content analysis on 264/1,677 articles: Limited reporting of alcohol's benefits, emphasised negative effects of alcohol, and 38% talked about alcohol policies (but very few talked about new federal labelling laws).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atkin, DeJong 2000</td>
<td>College newspapers Alcohol and other drugs Two weeks in 1994-95 Framing Sample 1: 50 newspapers to make a representative sample; identified 46 items for analysis. Sample 2: 150 complete editions from 12 colleges; identified 111 items for analysis. Alcohol reported in 1 in 2 items versus 1 in 5 items mentioning other drugs. 75% stories talked about legal, health and social problems associated with AOD use; very limited coverage of detection, intervention and treatments. Half of the articles discussed policies, but mostly related to law enforcement.</td>
<td></td>
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USA

USA
Missing opportunities to inform readers about contributing factors to AOD problems and prevention solutions.

| Golden  | 2000 | Television | Mothers, alcohol | 1977-1996 | Framing | 36 broadcasts Early coverage focused on white, middle-class women, as scientific authorities and government officials warned against drinking during pregnancy. After 1987, however, women who drank during pregnancy were depicted as members of minority groups and as a danger to society. The thematic transition began before warning labels appeared on alcoholic beverages and gained strength from official government efforts to prevent fetal alcohol syndrome. The greatest impetus for the revised discourse, however, was the eruption of a "moral panic" over crack cocaine use. By linking fetal harm to substance abuse, the panic suggested it was in the public's interest to control the behaviour of pregnant women. | USA |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Yanovitzky Stryker | 2001 | Television Newspapers | Binge drinking | 1978-1996 | Media effects | Found increases in news media attention to binge drinking and the introduction of legislative bills dealing with binge drinking. | USA |
| Yanovitzky | 2002 | National newspapers | Drink driving | 1978-1995 | Media effects | Coverage of drink driving increased after 1980, peaked in 1983, remained steady after that; similar increase in policy attention to DUI 81% episodic frames, remainder talk about policy solutions Law enforcement solutions mentioned increasingly “news coverage of DUI contributed to a decline in prevalence of DUI through its impact on anti-DUI policy, which in turn motivated drivers to minimise or quit this practice in order to avoid formal sanctions”. | USA |
| Myhre Flora | 2002 | Newspapers (9 Californian) | Alcohol | 1997-1998 | Framing & prominence | 1,855 articles identified for analysis. Trauma/injury in 25% of stories; alcohol advertising 22%; DUI 17%. One fifth related to prevention and health with high mentions of policies but most related to DUI alone. | USA |
Frames deployed: 58% episodic, 24% thematic, and 17% mixed. Advocacy should focus on increasing frequency of reports & thematic framing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Study Type</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Torronen</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Newspapers (6 dailies) Editorial</td>
<td>Alcohol policy changes</td>
<td>1993-2000</td>
<td>Discourse analysis</td>
<td>280 editorials identified; major themes covered Finnish government monopoly and restrictions on trade, youth drinking, public order and security, DUI; market vs. state, community order vs. the young, public order vs. disorder. Three major storylines identified: ‘liberalisation of alcohol policy’ (1993-97), ‘building abilities and competencies for the police to eliminate disturbances in public places’ and ‘we should make the parents more responsible for their children’ (1998-2000).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connor Wesolowski</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>Fatal vehicle accidents</td>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>Framing</td>
<td>Papers covered 278 fatal crashes over the two year period, in contrast to 846 fatal crashes documented in FARS. Papers assigned blame in 90% of crashes covered, under-reported restraint use and driver’s risk of death, failed to reflect the protective value of restraints, and misrepresented the roles played by alcohol and teen drivers. Conclusion: Newspaper coverage did not accurately reflect real risk. Papers presented fatal crashes as dramas with a victim/villain storyline; in keeping with this narrative strategy, papers were most likely to cover stories where a driver survived to take the blame. By highlighting crashes that diverge from the norm, focusing on the assignment of blame to a single party, and failing to convey the message that preventive practices like seatbelt use increase odds for survival, newspapers removed crashes from a public health context and positioned them as individual issues. Public health practitioners can work with media outlets in their areas to draw attention to misrepresentations and change the way these stories are framed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harwood Witson Fan</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2 local newspapers</td>
<td>Underage drinking</td>
<td>1994-2003</td>
<td>Framing</td>
<td>High press coverage of alcohol bills during the legislative process was associated with defeated legislation, whereas little or no press coverage was associated with bills successfully passed into law. The authors conclude that more work is needed to understand how media</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Source/ Setting</td>
<td>Strategy/Purpose</td>
<td>Time Period</td>
<td>Method</td>
<td>Findings/Implications</td>
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<td>Wagenaar</td>
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<td>Advocacy strategies may hinder enactment of bill</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slater Long Ford</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>TV (local &amp; national) Local newspapers National magazines</td>
<td>Violent crime, accidents &amp; injuries</td>
<td>2002-2003 (one month in each year)</td>
<td>Framing</td>
<td>1,276 articles mentioning alcohol. Alcohol’s role in violent crime and traffic accidents is under-reported relative to epidemiological estimates of its contribution. Might mean people may judge risks lower than they actually are. More advocacy required for policy solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlyle Slater Chakroff</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Nationally representative sample of newspapers</td>
<td>Intimate partner violence</td>
<td>One month each in 2002 &amp; 2003</td>
<td>Framing</td>
<td>395 articles 88% of articles framed IPV as episodic, thematic only in 11% Alcohol use mentioned in 5% of articles as reason for IPV; compared with two thirds of incidents in epidemiological data i.e. Alcohol is an important risk factor for IPV and its under-reported in the news</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stryker Moriarty Jensen</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Newspapers (32 national and metropolitan)</td>
<td>Modifiable risk for cancer</td>
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<td>954 articles, very little attention to prevention; greater emphasis on tobacco and diet than sun, alcohol, exercise... i.e. Alcohol under-reported as a modifiable risk factor for cancer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Campo Askelson Mastin Slonske</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Newspapers (32 national and metropolitan)</td>
<td>College binge drinking strategies</td>
<td>1997-2006</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>255 articles covered binge drinking strategies. Most frequently covered policy was ‘increasing student knowledge.’ Most frequently reported strategies were NOT evidence based and were environmental in nature. Strategies classed as effective were rarely covered.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Askelson Camo Mastin Slonske</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Newspapers (32 national and metropolitan)</td>
<td>Parenting practices &amp; communication strategies for binge drinking</td>
<td>1997-2006</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>255 articles, only 49 mention parenting strategies (e.g. notifying parents of student’s problematic drinking) and communicating with older students about alcohol; least mentioned strategies were talking w students about the consequences of problem drinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ronzani Fernandes Et al</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>National magazine</td>
<td>Drugs</td>
<td>1999 - 2003</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
<td>481 articles: consumption most frequent topic, cocaine in 21% of articles, marijuana 19%; alcohol 12%, tobacco 12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapman et al</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Television</td>
<td>All health news stories</td>
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**USA**

**Brazil**

**Australia**
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Nicholls 2011</th>
<th>7 daily newspapers</th>
<th>Alcohol stories</th>
<th>2 weeks Dec 2008; 1 week Mar 2009</th>
<th>Content analysis Framing</th>
<th>20 TV items; 186 newspaper articles: 28 editorials, 45 celeb stories, remainder reported negative outcomes such as violence, antisocial behaviour, DUI, negative health impacts; 6 stories about positive health effects; 8 editorials opposed minimum pricing (punishing the majority); 6 supported it; remaining editorials were about negative effects of drinking Violence most commonly reported consequence = health central to framing of alcohol Clear gender divide: male drinking associated with violence, female drinking associated with appearing drunk; supermarkets identified the source of cheap alcohol; public health advocates have established themselves as key sources but no consensus on policy issues</th>
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UK

Sweden
### AUDIENCE STUDIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Country</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lowe</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Pre &amp; post measures of effect of reading news cuttings about alcohol</td>
<td>Those pupils who received only a negative message became significantly more negative in their attitudes towards alcohol. Those receiving only a positive message were significantly more positive afterwards. The control group and those receiving both positive and negative messages showed little change. These findings are discussed in terms of their implications for alcohol education programs at school.</td>
<td>USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lowe</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>13 statements about alcohol, drinking and health</td>
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<td>USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lowe</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>One group read only positive, one group read only negative, control group got both</td>
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<td>USA</td>
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<td>Slater</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Telephone survey re: National &amp; local TV news</td>
<td>Attention to accident and crime news predicts adolescent risk judgments and mediates the influence of sensation seeking and negative experience on such risk judgments. Teens who reported greater attention to news about crime, accidents, and injury did perceive greater risks of alcohol but exposure to news was unrelated to risk perceptions. Girls reported greater perceptions of risk than boys, as did those who reported they had never been drunk. Younger teens as did those with poorer grades also perceived greater risks of alcohol use.” Attention to news coverage of crime and accidents increases youth judgments of risks of injury resulting from alcohol use; effects would appear to be stronger for youth who have had negative first or second-hand experiences with alcohol risks, as such youth are more attentive to stories about accidents, crime, and injuries. The effect of increased news coverage of alcohol’s role in crime and accidents may be less compelling for the more at-risk adolescent sensation seekers... sensation seekers pay less attention to such coverage, and not that they ignore it altogether. The more at-risk sensation seekers would, it seems, require a greater dose of such coverage in the news environment if they are to notice and be influenced at all. So the relatively low levels of such coverage at present may be especially problematic for at-risk sensation seekers; it makes the risks associated with alcohol use that much easier to ignore.</td>
<td>USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hayes</td>
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<td>“how much attention do you pay to crime, motor vehicle accidents, other accidents, assault...”</td>
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<td>USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ford</td>
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<td>“how concerned are you about... by people under the influence of alcohol”</td>
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<td>USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lowe</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prior negative experiences w alcohol</td>
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<td>USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lowe</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sensation seeking</td>
<td></td>
<td>USA</td>
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<td>Lowe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beullens et al.</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Questionnaires with secondary school students</td>
<td>Boys watch more news than girls, no differences on other media. Girls perceived speeding &amp; DUI as more dangerous than did boys, reported lower intention to perform these behaviours; this was associated w news viewing. More television news viewing was associated with a higher perceived risk of drunk driving and speeding. Music television viewing, on the other hand, was negatively associated with the assessment of the dangers of driving faster than allowed and driving under the influence of alcohol. The more dangerous a particular driving behaviour was perceived to be, the less likely respondents intended to exhibit this behaviour in the future.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slater et al.</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Telephone survey (N=1,272)</td>
<td>News exposure in general was not predictive. Attention to news about crime, accidents predicted support for law enforcement and advertising restrictions, but not server liability. Apparently, the more attention is paid to stories about violent crime and accidents, the greater the concern about alcohol-related injuries due to assault and accidents.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connor et al.</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Analysis of comments to news stories about DUI</td>
<td>The majority of posts (57%) were neutral on DUI enforcement; 24 per cent (148) took a negative tone and 19 per cent (115) positive. Posts that discussed checkpoints were 2.6 times more likely to take a negative tone toward enforcement than those that did not. Twenty-one per cent of anti-enforcement posts challenged the idea that driving after drinking was necessarily dangerous. Conclusion: Public responses to DUI enforcement news articles provide insight into the beliefs and thought processes of those who oppose enforcement efforts or view drinking and driving as no big deal. Primary objections to enforcement focused on civil and personal rights issues, scepticism regarding law enforcement's motives and objectivity, and the belief that drinking driving is not a &quot;real&quot; crime. Online news message boards could be useful in informing campaigns and helping program planners frame media events and press releases to best appeal to the most at-risk segments of the driving public.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beullens et al.</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Two-wave survey (2006 &amp; 2008) N=2,193 Secondary school students</td>
<td>News: 7% never, 26% every day, 32% several times in a week, 14% once a week, 14% once or twice a month. Boys reported more risky driving behaviour; DUI less common: 17% had done it a few times a year, 6% at least once a month. More action viewing was associated with more positive attitudes toward joyriding.</td>
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More news viewing was negatively associated with attitudes toward joyriding. More news viewing appeared to be an indirect negative predictor of reckless driving, whereas more exposure to action programs was associated with more risk taking in traffic.